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COVER 1 of 9

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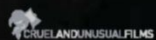


BATMAN v SUPERMAN

DAWN OF JUSTICE

WARNER BROS. PICTURES PRESENTS
AN ATLAS ENTERTAINMENT/CRUEL AND UNUSUAL PRODUCTION A ZACK SNYDER FILM "BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE" BEN AFFLECK HENRY CAVILL AMY ADAMS
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BASED ON DC COMICS CHARACTERS CREATED BY BOB KANE BATMAN WRITTEN BY JERRY SIEGEL AND JOE SHUSTER SUPERMAN EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS CHRISTOPHER NOLAN EMMA THOMAS WESLEY COLLIER GEOFF JOHNS DAVID S. GOYER
WRITTEN BY CHRIS TERRIO AND DAVID S. GOYER PRODUCED BY CHARLES ROVEN, P.G.A. DEBORAH SNOYER, P.G.A. DIRECTED BY ZACK SNYDER

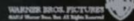
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ED'S LETTER

WHEN YOU READ THIS IT'LL BE JUST A FEW DAYS SINCE the Jameson Empire Awards — our annual celebration of the absolute best in the world of film. We'll have saluted the winners, held the also-rans as they wept, welcomed the new, said goodbye to those that we sadly lost, had a few drams, made a show of ourselves on the dance floor, slept a little and loved a lot. You see, apart from a rollicking good party, the wonderful thing about the Awards is that we get to spend a few hours in a room of people who love what we love as fiercely as we love it. Not just that, they're the ones who actually make it. They're responsible for that churn of excitement and trepidation that fills our guts when the lights go down. Though many of you won't have been able to be there with us, we hope you got involved via Twitter, Periscope and empireonline.com — head there now to catch up on all the action and pick up next month's magazine for a glorious celebration of the night. The only people who mean more to us than the magicians behind our favourite movies are you guys: it's all for you, after all.

And we have an extra-special treat for you this month, too: the most in-depth, exclusive access to *X-Men: Apocalypse* of any magazine anywhere. We have nine special, jaw-dropping covers to collect. And for our subscribers, an incredible free one-of-a-kind poster. Just one of the many perks of signing up (not to mention saving cash, getting the mag first and my personal favourite, never having to leave the house in daylight). See p.122 if you want to know more about joining our crew. We would love to have you.

Along with that we have stories on *Green Room*, *Ghostbusters*, *Game Of Thrones* and the greatest stuntman tale you'll never have read.

Enjoy the issue. I know I would say this, but it's a blinder.

Terri

TERRI WHITE
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"One of my favourite things is bald men with beards."



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76 GAME OF THRONES Dun dun, da-dur dun dun, da-dur dun dun, da-dur dun dun... Ugh. *Knew* there was a reason we stopped trying to write out theme-tunes. Looks like crap Dothraki.

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Clockwise from above: X marks the spot for James McAvoy in *X-Men: Apocalypse*; *Fargo* sees Jesse Plemons trying out his butchery skills; Tim Burton's *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiars*, a sanctuary for spooky kids.



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PREVIEW



EDITED by CHRIS HEWITT



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

STREAM ON

THE GHOSTBUSTERS ARE READY TO ROCK YOUR WORLD

WANTED MY ladies to be badass," says Paul Feig, director of the female-led reboot of *Ghostbusters*.

"I wanted them to get in over their heads and fight ghosts."

Which is exactly what you're seeing here. The new *Ghostbusters* (Kristen Wiig, Melissa McCarthy, and *Saturday Night Live* duo Leslie Jones and Kate McKinnon) unloading their proton packs in anger at a winged demon that has gatecrashed a rock concert, intent on turning everything up to 666. And just look at that glorious formation — there's absolutely no danger of crossing the streams. "I like the idea of them having to enter a giant setting and take on ghosts," says Feig.

From the moment the director announced his reboot a couple of years ago, the project has had more than its fair share of decriers. There are those

who are sceptical about the very notion of remaking Ivan Reitman's 1984 classic. Then there are the misogynistic hate squad, a poisonous social media mob who are apparently apoplectic about a movie starring a group of women. In 2016.

Feig has remained dignified throughout, keeping his focus on delivering a movie that can live alongside the Bill Murray-Dan Aykroyd vintage while pushing the busting of ghosts in a more visceral direction. "I like action movies," says Feig. "I got to play with that in *Spy*, and it felt very natural here. It makes it fun and very unexpected for people when they hear it's four lady Ghostbusters. It may be quite different than what they think." In other words, they ain't afraid of no ghosts — it's time for the ghosts to be afraid of them. **CHRIS HEWITT**

GHOSTBUSTERS IS OUT ON JULY 15.

014

MAY 2016

PREMIERE



The Statesman HQ
— an understated
distillery.



The Kingsman cab
doesn't just go south
of the river, it goes
into the river.

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

INSIDE THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

EXCLUSIVE: MATTHEW VAUGHN INTRODUCES THE WORLD OF HIS "BIGGER, BOLDER, CRAZIER" *KINGSMAN* SEQUEL



EQUELS ARE weird," sighs Matthew Vaughn (below). "The audience wants what you did before, but if you do that, they

go: 'Well, this is just fucking unoriginal and boring!' Writing this was the hardest thing I've ever done."

"This" is *Kingsman: The Golden Circle*, the follow-up to Vaughn's *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. One of the surprise smashes of last year, the batshit-insane spy caper launched Taron Egerton's career (see page 92), turned Colin Firth, at 55 years of age, into a bona fide action hero, and made over \$400 million worldwide. A sequel was always likely with those numbers, but Vaughn, who previously passed on directing sequels to *Kick-Ass* and *X-Men: First Class*, was by no means a shoo-in to return.

"I didn't know if I wanted to direct this or not," says the director, who has given *Empire* exclusive access to early concept art for the film. "I was worried about the villain. Spy films are only as good as their villains. Then one morning I woke up with the whole storyline in place, and a new villain plot."

It's too early to divulge details, but we can reveal the villain is called Poppy, and will be played by Julianne Moore. When a surprise attack leaves the Kingsman organisation reeling, it's up to former wide boy Eggsy (Egerton) and trusty quartermaster Merlin (Mark Strong) to take her on, with the help of American counterparts the Statesmen.

Headed up by the swaggering, sharpshooting cowboy Jack, and Halle Berry's Ginger, Vaughn says the introduction of the American agents will keep the film feeling "fresh and unique".

The relationship between Jack and Eggsy may also fill the void created by the absence of Firth's Harry Hart, who was bumped off towards the end of the first movie. Vaughn says that Firth may show up for an "Obi-Wan Kenobi"-style cameo in flashbacks, but don't expect a miraculous recovery. "I think the world would like to see Colin again," he says, "but sadly we're not a sci-fi movie."

The first film wasn't sci-fi, but it was a Bond movie's naughty cousin. There was swearing. There was a very controversial anal sex joke. And there was extraordinary über-violence, most notably the sequence where Firth single-handedly wiped out a church congregation.

"You try not to read what people want, but they do want another church sequence," says Vaughn. "I have no reason for a massacre to happen. But I have other sequences you've never seen before."

It's all very early doors, but Vaughn has plans for an epic skiing sequence, and the mother of all barroom brawls. "There's an opportunity to make it bigger and funnier and crazier,"

says Vaughn. Which translates as robot dogs, one-armed henchmen and good guys being attacked with "a massive fucking frankfurter". Long live the Kingsmen. **CHRIS HEWITT**

KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE IS OUT ON JUNE 16, 2017.

Eggsy (Taron Egerton) and Merlin (Mark Strong) survey the aftermath of a surprise attack on Kingsman HQ.

Welcome to Poppyland, the lair of Julianne Moore's villain.



ON SET EXCLUSIVE!

OH OH OH IT'S MAGIC

CAN NOW YOU SEE ME 2 PULL OFF NEW TRICKS?



REENWICH, London, and it's absolutely bucketing down. Or should that be bucketing up? Flanked by the two pillared blocks of the Royal Naval College, Jesse Eisenberg is pulling off a mighty impression of a meteorological Moses. "I've been told I have control issues," Eisenberg, as premier prestidigitator J. Daniel Atlas, bellows into the 200-strong crowd. "Well, if I can't control people, I might as well control the weather..." Then, with arms raised and eyes narrowing, he does exactly that. The downpour reverses and the rain starts fizzing back up into the night sky. Okay, so the rain's from a rain

machine, but it's an impressively brain-boggling display of (apologies in advance) eau-cus pocus.

"Believe it or not, this is a real trick," Eisenberg tells *Empire* as he dries off between takes. "As in the first film, we've taken an illusion that can be done in the real world on a smaller scale and then pushed it. Like, *really* pushed it. We're making the rain go crazy — up, sideways, even levitating. It should make for a great set-piece — huge, cutting-edge and super-inventive."

Eisenberg's stunt is the first in a flurry of grand illusions staged around Greenwich for the sleeper-hit sequel. The following day, at the Cutty Sark, Lizzy Caplan will "produce a flock of doves in one take, for real", says magic consultant Keith Barry, who's designed all of the sequel's illusions to work 'in-scene', without CG. Original director Louis Leterrier has made way for Jon

M. Chu, who's bringing the expertise that reinvigorated the *Step Up* series. "The way he's choreographing the set-pieces is almost like an elaborate dance number," says producer Bobby Cohen. What with the booming music and sea of multi-coloured umbrellas, Eisenberg's rain-sequence has more than a hint of a Busby Berkeley vibe.

Globe-trotting from New York to London to Macau, *Now You See Me 2* — or *NYSM2*, according to the posters, even though that takes just as long to say — sees Woody Harrelson, Dave Franco and Eisenberg's world-famous magicians-turned-thieves The Four Horsemen (not to be confused with *X-Men: Apocalypse*'s Four Horsemen) temporarily reduced to The Three Horsemen after a pregnant Isla Fisher pulled out of the film. But with new recruit Lizzy Caplan soon on board, they... do something. Magicians never

Above: Woody Harrelson's Merritt McKinney and Dave Franco's Jack Wilder in *Now You See Me 2*.



reveal their secrets, and all that.

"The movie opens with the Horsemen coming out of hiding for a new show," says Eisenberg. "At the risk of sounding like a magician, I can't reveal too much, but they soon get pulled into a strange, dangerous world."

So there's no news on how Mark Ruffalo's Dylan Rhodes, the FBI agent who turned out to be the mastermind behind the first film's heists, fits in this time around. But we *do* know Daniel Radcliffe, the most famous wizard in the world, has been cast as Michael Caine's son, hell-bent on avenging the Horsemen for landing Caine's slippery Arthur Tressler in prison. "Daniel adored the first movie, but told us he'd join on one condition," says Cohen. Which was? "Please, whatever you do, don't put a wand in my hand..." **SIMON CROOK**

NOW YOU SEE ME 2 IS OUT ON JULY 8.

Top: Franco, Eisenberg and Caplan mid-con? **Above:** Things do not seem to be going well for the Tresslers...

SERIOUS INVESTIGATION

CAST OFF

IS NYSM2 THE YEAR'S STARRIEST BLOCKBUSTER? WE USED SCIENCE TO FIND OUT...



SUICIDE SQUAD

CAST: Jared Leto, Will Smith, Margot Robbie, Viola Davis, Joel Kinnaman, Jai Courtney



BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS)

\$4.96

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: **388**



NOW YOU SEE ME 2

CAST: Mark Ruffalo, Daniel Radcliffe, Jesse Eisenberg, Michael Caine, Morgan Freeman, Woody Harrelson



BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS)

\$11.2

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: **521**



X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

CAST: Jennifer Lawrence, James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender, Nicholas Hoult, Oscar Isaac, Rose Byrne



BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS)

\$7.1

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: **142**



CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

CAST: Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Anthony Mackie, Sebastian Stan, Scarlett Johansson, Chadwick Boseman



BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS)

\$9.11

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: **405**



BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

CAST: Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck, Jesse Eisenberg, Jeremy Irons, Gal Gadot, Amy Adams



BOX OFFICE (BILLIONS)

\$7.4

ACTORS' AVERAGE IMDB RANKING: **307**

WINNER!

BEST OF TIMES/WORST OF TIMES

JON FAVREAU

THE JUNGLE BOOK DIRECTOR TALKS SPACESUITS, FAT ASSES
AND SWINGING WITH DENNIS HOPPER



COSTUME

Swingers was fun. I was going for a certain aesthetic. I'm thinking of the open-collared, short-sleeved shirts with slacks and shoes. I look at it now and we were young and sharp. It really feels like a different life. **It felt very special.**

In *Deep Impact*, we had to wear the second-generation NASA suit. It was based on what NASA was working on. It was so heavy — it was hard like armour, with big helmets and backpacks. That was pretty brutal.

Swingers got into the Venice Film Festival. I'd never been to Europe and then I went to a black-tie screening on the Lido. After, I got to sit with Dennis Hopper, telling me how much he enjoyed the film.



MOMENT



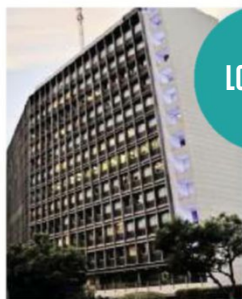
I had a tremendous affection for *Cowboys & Aliens*, but I realised that the concept wasn't connecting when the trailer first showed. People saw the name and they didn't know how to react. I got a sense this wasn't going to go well.

Rudy, in Chicago. I came in thinking I didn't have a shot. It was a lead in a Hollywood film, and I hadn't had much chance to prepare. David Anspaugh, the director, said, "It says you are an improviser; go ahead and improv." I was confident and having a good time. It clicked.

AUDITION

Auditioning for Fat Ass in *The Shawshank Redemption*. My agent said, "I got an audition for you. It's a great script, based on Stephen King." Then they told me the name — Fat Ass. That was humbling, but of course I did it. The audition wasn't bad, but I didn't get the part.

I really liked working in downtown Los Angeles, at LA Center Studios. We had a backlot for *Jungle Book* and we would build little sets that could be rolled into the stages. And being able to go home every night was a luxury.



LOCATION



I did *Very Bad Things* out in Vasquez Rocks, a rocky desert on the outskirts of LA. It's beautiful, but desert doesn't mean hot, it means dry. It was bitterly cold, and we were in khaki pants and T-shirts. It tests your commitment.

PIECE OF DIRECTION

From David Anspaugh on *Rudy*. I was used to doing comedy in Chicago, so after my first day, I thought I was killing it. David turned off my radio mic and said, "Just a little smaller. Okay?" I was impressed he was concerned I wasn't embarrassed in front of anybody.



It's not a piece of direction, but what I do notice is that when I give direction, I've learned to be more open to what I'm seeing unfolding, even if it's not what I imagined.

THE JUNGLE BOOK IS OUT ON APRIL 15.



Andrew Lincoln has yet to see *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Too busy killing zombies, we reckon.



Ryan Reynolds cried the first time he wore the Deadpool costume. Tears of joy, rather than it being too tight around his deadpools.



Jack Black says he was originally meant to sing Marvin Gaye's *Got To Give It Up* in *High Fidelity*.



Jason Isaacs voiced three of the PG Tips chimps in the 1990s. THREE.



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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

A CERTAIN POINT OF VIEW

WHY *HARDCORE HENRY* IS THE YEAR'S MOST INSANE ACTION FILM

INEMA, OF COURSE, is no stranger to POV shots. And, if you can will yourself to recall a major section in 2005's undercooked game adaptation *Doom*, no stranger to entire POV sequences. But entire POV movies have been few and far between. There's the 1947 Philip Marlowe thriller *Lady In The Lake*, and more recently Gaspar Noé's demented *Enter The Void*, but generally speaking, shooting an entire movie through one character's eyes takes a demented genius to make it work. Enter Ilya Naishuller, director of *Hardcore Henry*.

"The funny thing is," says Naishuller, "I never thought of myself as a technical guy." But after dropping out of film school, the fresh-faced 30-year-old could be the first director from the YouTube generation to graduate to the high-tech action A-list after his outrageous sci-fi shocker caused a \$10 million bidding war at the Toronto Film Festival last year.

Starring you, the viewer, as a cyborg soldier named Henry, who's been brought back from the dead by his wife, who is *then* kidnapped by a telekinetic ganglord, *Hardcore Henry* plunges you into a maelstrom of madness as Henry tries to get her back. It's a hyper-kinetic sugar rush of an action movie, with Naishuller pulling off ambitious action sequences thanks to fearless stuntmen, seamless editing and clever deployment of specially rigged GoPro Hero 3 cameras "on the chin".



Top: Haley Bennett as Estelle, with telekinetic ganglord. **Middle:** A POV shot especially for you. **Bottom:** Sharlto Copley as Jimmy, Henry's 'mysterious' minder.

The movie was grandfathered by equally gonzo Russian director Timur Bekmambetov, who saw a couple of first-person action shorts, *Bad Motherfucker* and *Insane Office Escape*, that Naishuller had uploaded to YouTube.

"We got on Skype and Timur said, 'Congratulations! Would you like to do a full feature?'" recalls Naishuller. "I said, 'No.' But then he said, 'Don't you want to see a POV film up on the big screen?' I said, 'Actually, I do.' He said, 'Then go and make one.' His actual words were: 'No-one's gonna make a better film than you at this point.' I thought, 'Nah, I'm pretty sure James Cameron can do a better job. But he's busy — so why not?'" Sounds like a challenge to us, Mr. Cameron... DW

HARDCORE HENRY IS OUT ON APRIL 8.



Tye Sheridan has bagged the lead role of ace hacker Wade Watts in Steven Spielberg's *Ready Player One*.



It's not the years or the mileage — Harrison Ford and Steven Spielberg will reunite for a fifth *Indiana Jones*, due July 19, 2019.



Peter Berg and Mark Wahlberg have teamed up again on *Patriots Day*, a thriller about the Boston bombings.



Harry Styles has joined Christopher Nolan's World War II epic *Dunkirk*. Yes, that Harry Styles. And yes, that Christopher Nolan.

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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

FRESH FISH

ANDREW STANTON FINDS HIS WAY BACK TO PIXAR WITH *FINDING DORY*



AFTER *FINDING Nemo*, I thought I was done," says Andrew Stanton. But just when he thought he was out, he pulled himself back in.

"About seven years later, I found myself watching the film again and realised I was worried about Dory."

Dory, of course, was the forgetful fish, voiced memorably by Ellen DeGeneres in the first movie, who tagged along with Albert Brooks' Marlin as he tried desperately to find his son. Spoiler: he did. So, *Nemo* was found, and Stanton had long since moved onto his ultimately ill-fated *John Carter*. It seemed, like Brad Bird before him, that he was making the transition from animation to live action. But he just couldn't forget Dory.

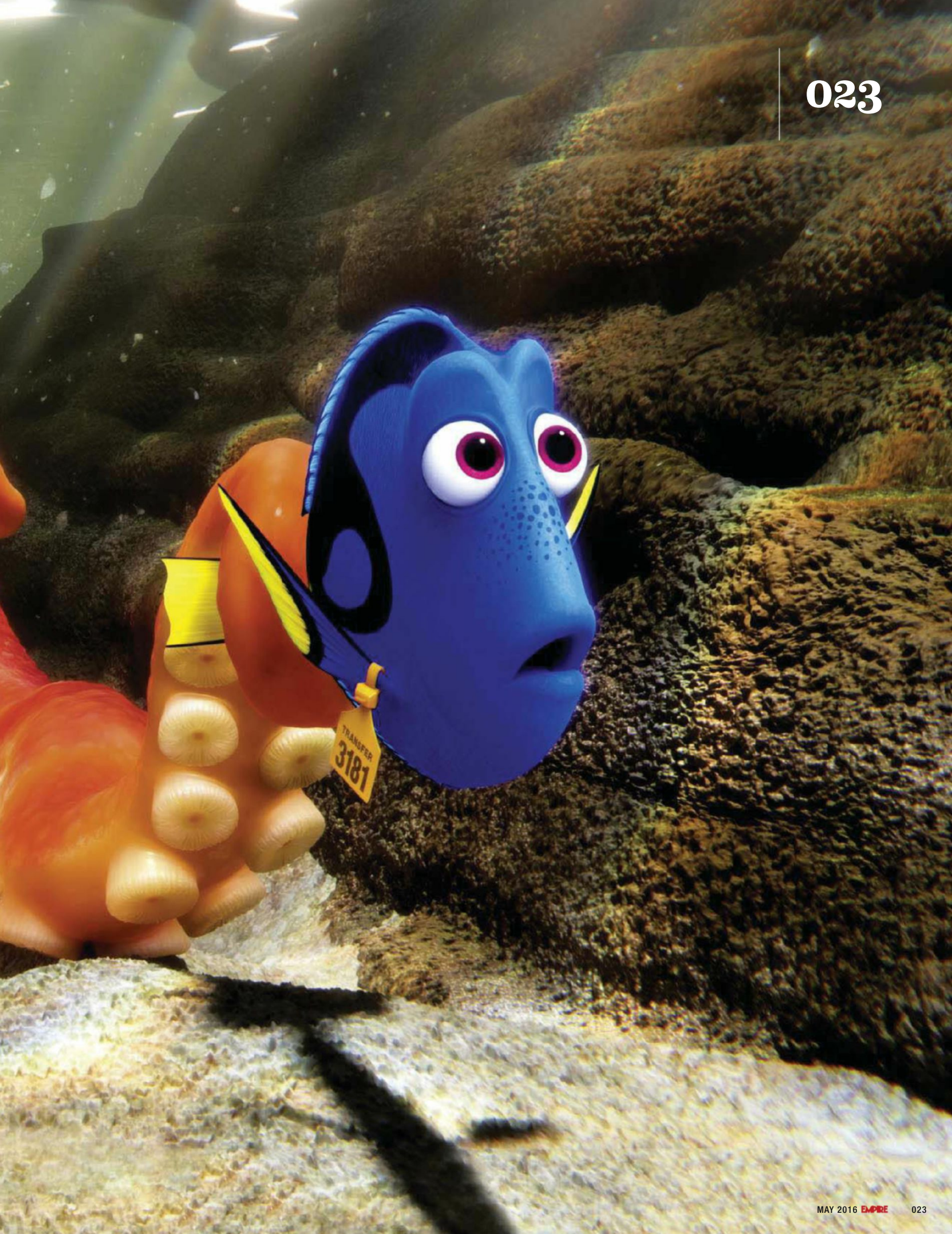
Even as he started work, Stanton refused to so much as think the words "Finding Dory", wary of inviting immediate pressure to deliver. He hired writer Victoria Strouse, and only once

they were sure they had a story did he pitch anything to the studio's brain trust. It was September 2012, two years after Stanton started work, that the project was publicly announced.

The finished tale picks up one year after *Nemo* was found, with Dory living in a brain coral next to Marlin's anemone home. All seems rosy — but one day a slight accident triggers Dory's memory of her family, and she sets out in search of them. Numerous adventures lead her to a Marine Life Institute, where she meets Hank (Ed O'Neill), a grumpy octopus escape artist who agrees to help her.

The movie is a homecoming for Stanton after *Carter* floundered at the box office. "To go back into animation production was like comfortable shoes," he says. "I still have a lot of other live action ideas, and I'm hoping sometime in the future I'll get to do them." For now, being the biggest fish in a big pond is more than enough for us. **HELEN O'HARA**

FINDING DORY IS OUT ON JULY 29.





THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT... *THE DARK TOWER*

AS THE LONG-AWAITED
MOVIE ADAPTATION FINALLY
GOES INTO PRODUCTION

ILLUSTRATION MICHAEL WHELAN





T LAST — AFTER years trudging through development hell, Stephen King's magnum opus, *The Dark Tower*, is heading to the big screen. So, what is it? Who's in it? Why should you care? Here's the *Empire* lowdown.

1 While King is best known for his horror work, this is a fantasy epic that spans different timelines and dimensions, inspired by an unlikely combination of Robert Browning's poem, *Childe Roland To The Dark Tower Came*, *The Lord Of The Rings*, and the Spaghetti Westerns of Sergio Leone.

2 It tells the tale of Roland Deschain, a gunslinger who comes from a version of Earth called Mid-World. For reasons far too complex to go into here, Roland's obsessed with making it to the Dark Tower, the nexus of all existence, and demanding answers from whatever deity resides within.

3 To help him in his quest, he is accompanied by his *ka-tet*, a motley crew of characters drawn from different time periods. Among them are Eddie Dean, a former junkie; Susannah Dean, a paraplegic African-American; and Oy, a dog-like creature of indeterminate origin.

4 There are eight books in the series: *The Gunslinger*, *The Drawing Of The Three*, *The Waste Lands*, *Wizard & Glass*, *Wolves Of The Calla*, *Song Of Susannah*, *The Dark Tower* and *The Wind Through The Keyhole*.

5 *The Wind Through The Keyhole* was published in 2012, but is a prequel novel. The seventh book, which saw the saga end, was published in 2004.

6 There is also a comic book series, published by Marvel and endorsed by King, which began in 2007 and fills in the blanks of Roland's life and journey.

7 It is the crowning glory of King's career, with plot points and characters that weave through his entire bibliography. But you don't need to have read all of King's work to get these references.

8 The scale is so huge that a previous plan to adapt the books took the form of three movies, with two seasons of a linking TV show in-between.

9 Ron Howard had been previously attached to direct, with Akiva Goldsman writing the screenplay. The project had been set up initially at Universal, and then Warner Bros., where it ultimately fell apart.

10 It was announced in early March that Sony had picked up the rights and, with Howard and Goldsman on board as producers, was pushing ahead.

11 Nikolaj Arcel, who wrote the Swedish version of *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* and directed Danish drama *A Royal Affair*, will write and direct.

12 He's already cast his Roland — in a progressive and significant piece of colour-blind casting, Idris Elba will be practising Roland's trademark finger-spiral as the gunslinger.

13 And Elba will be chasing down Matthew McConaughey as Walter Padick, the Man In Black, who is also Randall Flagg, the bad guy of *The Stand*. Told you it was meta-textual.

14 King himself tweeted confirmation of their casting, and he did so using the very first line from the very first book.

15 Young British actor Tom Taylor will play Jake Chambers, another key member of the *ka-tet*.

16 Abbey Lee — last seen hissing the word 'schlanger' in *Mad Max: Fury Road* — has also joined the cast as Tirana, who's a minor character in the books.

17 Arcel has been circumspect about the number of films planned, but rather than announcing a trilogy, or a series of movies, Sony is taking it one film at a time.

18 The first film won't simply be an adaptation of the first, rather slim, volume, *The Gunslinger*. King has confirmed that it will begin in the middle of the story.

19 The number 19 plays an important part in *The Dark Tower* mythos. King, who started writing the series when he was 19, tweeted the news of the production at 9.19am. Which, of course, adds up to... **CHRIS HEWITT**

THE DARK TOWER IS OUT ON FEBRUARY 17, 2017.

Best Twitter buds: Matthew McConaughey (who plays the Man In Black) and Idris Elba (who plays gunslinger Roland Deschain).



THIS MONTH IN STAR WARS



REVEALED!

Filming on *Episode VIII* is well and truly underway. To mark this auspicious occasion, a video was posted on starwars.com that showed writer-director Rian Johnson and crew filming a scene on Skellig Michael, the Irish island that has become Luke Skywalker's temporary home. The scene appears to pick up where *The Force Awakens* left off...

2

CONFIRMED!

Along with the video came confirmation of most of *Episode VIII*'s key cast, including those we knew about (John Boyega, Daisy Ridley, Oscar Isaac, Adam Driver, Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher), those who'd been rumoured (Benicio Del Toro) and those we didn't see coming (Laura Dern and newcomer Kelly Marie Tran). Curiously, Peter Mayhew's name was left off the list.

3

RUMOURED!

Although *Episode VIII* is still 18 months away, salvation, it seems, may be at hand. There are rumours that Star Wars Day, May 4, may well see the official unveiling of the next instalment's name. Two frontrunners have reportedly emerged, both of which should be taken with a huge pinch of salt: *Tale From The Jedi Temple*, and *The Order Of The Dark Side*.

REPORT

BACKLASH BLUES

Causing controversy:
Zoe Saldana as Nina
Simone, with added
prosthetic nose and
darker skin tone.

HOW TWO MUSICAL BIOPICS GENERATED VERY DIFFERENT CRITICAL REACTIONS



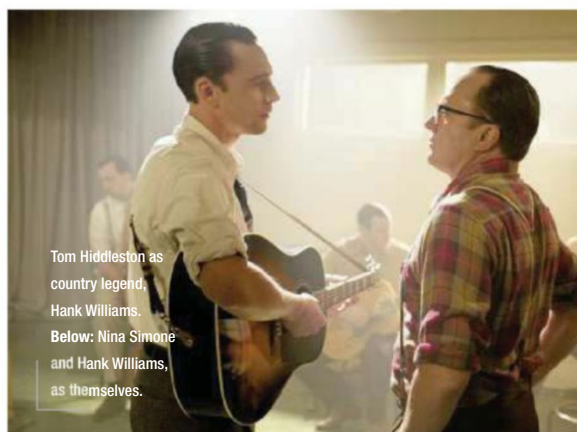
HIS IS A TALE OF two biopics. Both involve actors playing musical icons. Yet only one has become mired in controversy.

I Saw The Light

tells the tale of Hank Williams, the Alabama country singer responsible for classic songs like *Lovesick Blues*, who died at the height of his fame aged just 29. He's played in Marc Abraham's movie by Tom Hiddleston, a man so British his face could fit on a fiver. "He was the real deal," says Hiddleston of Williams. "His music was just so searingly honest."

Yet, despite not seeming the most obvious fit for Williams' unique brand of Americana, only a minor relative has come forward to suggest that Hiddleston might not be the most authentic choice.

Compare and contrast with *Nina*, Cynthia Mort's movie about the final years of blues legend Nina Simone. From the minute Zoe Saldana was cast in 2012 as a late replacement for Mary J. Blige, the film has attracted criticism from some quarters, including Simone's own daughter, Simone Kelly, for the decision to choose Saldana, a lighter-skinned



Tom Hiddleston as country legend Hank Williams. Below: Nina Simone and Hank Williams, as themselves.

Puerto Rican-American, to play the dark-skinned singer.

However, filming went ahead and now, almost four years later, after going through production difficulties, the movie is ready for its US release. Which is when it all kicked off again. A trailer for the movie, showcasing the heavy make-up Saldana underwent in order to play Simone, with darker skin and a prosthetic nose, was greeted with derision. A tweet from Saldana quoting Simone — "I'll tell you what freedom is to me — no fear" — elicited a response from @NinaSimoneMusic, the official Twitter account of Simone's estate, which had no involvement with the

film. "Cool story, but please take Nina's name out of your mouth. For the rest of your life."

Saldana has said in the past the controversy "did affect me", but on this occasion she has stayed mum. It has, though, reignited a debate about the authenticity of casting in biopics. Some, such as *Guardian* contributor Frances Acquah, feel that Saldana should never have been cast. Others, like Queen Latifah, have defended the right of Saldana, as with any actor, to play Simone.

Then there's the harsh realities of film financing to consider — it's entirely possible that the movie wouldn't have secured its funding had a lower profile but perhaps more physically apt actress been Mort's choice to replace Blige; a damning indictment of Hollywood's Catch-22 system: by not giving actresses of colour a chance to make their name, they restrict the opportunities that come their way.

Interestingly, Simone Kelly has once again weighed in, telling *Time* magazine, "It's unfortunate that Zoe Saldana is being attacked so viciously when she is someone who is part of a larger picture." If *Nina* is responsible for anything, it'll be for shining a long overdue light on race and representation in cinema. **CH**

**I SAW THE LIGHT IS OUT ON MAY 6.
NINA DOES NOT YET HAVE A UK
DISTRIBUTOR.**



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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

OUT OF THE OFFICE

RICKY GERVAIS HEADS TO NETFLIX FOR HIS NEXT MOVIE



IN THE DAY *EMPIRE* visits the Toronto set of Ricky Gervais' latest film, he's overseeing a scene where two journalists are on their knees, with guns pointed at their heads. It would be tempting to read symbolism into the set-up. Gervais has had a shifting relationship with the fourth estate over the years. In the days of *The Office* he could do no wrong, rightly celebrated for creating one of the best sitcoms in history. Since then, a perceived cockiness has turned certain parts of

the press against him. Is he about to take his revenge?

Well, no. *Special Correspondents* is a comedy, a very loose remake of 2009 French film *Envoyés Très Spéciaux*, and the two men with guns to their heads are Eric Bana and Gervais himself. The pair play a radio journalist and his technician who were supposed to be reporting from the frontline of a South American war, but a mixture of arrogance and foolishness meant they never made it out of New York. Rather than admit their screw-up and lose their jobs, they hole up in a flat and start filing fake reports, pretending they're in the thick of the fighting. Today they're staging their own kidnapping — the 'militia' holding them hostage are their neighbours, America Ferrara and Raúl Castillo.





"Like a lot of my work, this is about ordinary people out of their depth," says Gervais, who directs and writes. "I think that's what comedy is: an ordinary person trying to do something extraordinary but they haven't got the tools."

For his first film-directing job in six years, Gervais has hitched himself to the Netflix juggernaut, something he says he did because "they just leave you alone. I like to get my own way," he grins. "And to get my own way, I've always had to go to fringe channels. BBC2. Channel 4. HBO. Now Netflix comes along and says, 'Not only can you do what you want, but the sky's the limit in terms of ratings.' Why wouldn't I jump on that?" **OLLY RICHARDS**

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS IS ON NETFLIX FROM APRIL 29.

Above: Lounging around: Eric Bana, Ricky Gervais, America Ferrera and Raúl Castillo. **Left:** Radio journalist Frank Bonneville (Eric Bana) and his technician Albert Finch (Ricky Gervais) are living the lie.



LIVE EPISODE REPORT

200 AND COUNTING...

THE EMPIRE PODCAST HITS ANOTHER MILESTONE



HEY SAID IT couldn't be done. Perhaps they said it shouldn't be done, but we went and did it anyway. Four years ago, we launched the

Empire Podcast, a weekly show that combines movie news, reviews, and interviews with some of movieland's biggest and brightest stars, and in late February we hit a landmark: 200 episodes. That may not sound like much, but to put it in perspective, that's 135 more episodes than *'Allo 'Allo* managed. We still have some catching up to do on *Coronation Street*.

To celebrate, we held a live recording of the Podcast at the Prince Charles Cinema in late February, attended by a sell-out crowd and, of course, the Podcast team — Chris Hewitt, Helen O'Hara, Phil de Semlyen and John Nugent. And a cracking night it was, too — our special guests were the wonderfully deadpan director of *High-Rise*, Ben Wheatley, and the great Jason Isaacs, who regaled us



Above: Chris Hewitt gets the *Empire Podcast* show on the road. Special guests Jason Isaacs; Ben Wheatley.

with anecdotes from the set of *The Tall Guy* and *Event Horizon*, and revealed a long-held desire to play Daredevil. We didn't have the heart to tell him.

To hear the Podcast, or to catch up on the previous episodes if you have roughly 199 hours free, simply go to **empireonline.com/podcast**, or check it out on iTunes or Soundcloud. A subscription also includes our incredible spoiler specials, where we sit down with directors of the latest blockbusters, including Sam Mendes, Christopher McQuarrie, Joss Whedon and more, and grill them on all that third-act goodness. Next up: *Daredevil* Season 2 and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*...

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

FUNNY PECULIAR

TIM BURTON SPILLS ON HIS HAUNTING, MYSTERIOUS LATEST

WHEN TIM BURTON, was pulling potential future projects from his Timbola, one caught his eye right away. He had received a packet filled with vintage photographs of children in macabre situations. One featured two children dressed head-to-toe in clown costumes. Another showing a young girl standing in front of a ruined building... with a round hole in her torso.

They were the kind of insidiously creepy images that feed your nightmares. "I found them haunting and mysterious," Burton tells *Empire*. "They were intriguing—I wanted to find out more about them and their world."

The pictures, as it turns out, had illustrated and inspired Ransom Riggs' bestselling novel, *Miss Peregrine's Home For Peculiar Children*, and had been sent to Burton in the hope that they would appeal. It worked like a charm.

The story centres on Jacob, who travels to a mysterious Welsh island following the murder of his grandfather, only to find the titular institution. Run by Miss Peregrine, "a weird Mary Poppins-like character", Jacob discovers it's home to, well, a group of peculiar children. "Each of them has something unique about them, some kind of ability. But not super powers," explains Burton.

Burton admits that he was "worried about working with kids again", but he's surrounded his newcomers with a cracking cast of adults and older teens, including Asa Butterfield, seen here as Jacob alongside Ella Purnell as Emma, and Eva Green as Miss Peregrine. And with Jane Goldman on scripting duties, the foundations are in place for a truly unsettling kids' flick. Not so much funny ha ha, more... well, you get the drift. **CHRIS HEWITT**

MISS PEREGRINE'S HOME FOR PECULIARS IS OUT ON OCTOBER 7.



PREMIERE

MAY 2016

031



STIR CRAZIES

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

THE NETFLIX PRISON DRAMA IS BACK — ORANGE YOU GLAD?



ALL IT A COMEDY, CALL IT A DRAMA. Hell, call it a dramedy, but either way *Orange Is The New Black* is arguably Netflix's most bingeable original series. Over the past three seasons, we've seen nice-girl Piper (Taylor Schilling) go from wide-eyed noob in Litchfield Prison to a criminal kingpin (ruling an empire selling inmates' used panties to web pervs — it's that sort of a show).

Along the way, the show has been praised for its unflinching portrayal of issues such as gender identity, racism and rape. Last season turned a spotlight on the US prison system itself, as a for-profit corporation took over Litchfield with predictably horrendous results. And it looks as though Season 4 will turn that screw even harder. On our tour of the set, *Empire* clocks that the already-cramped beds in the sleeping quarters have been replaced with bunk-beds — suggesting more new inmates. "There's gonna be new blood — and that's gonna make blood boil!" Selenis Leyva, who plays leader of the Latina clique Gloria, whispers to *Empire*. And even though she's got a smile on her face, it's hard not to believe her.

We come to an overcrowded cafeteria, where the atmosphere is rowdy and relaxed. Dozens of beige-clad women (orange is relatively scarce) are watching, weirdly, *The Wiz*, but it's here where the show's true power hits home. The nearly wholly female cast is powerfully diverse, in age, ethnicity and sexuality (you've never seen a women's prison shower scene like the ones in this show). Actresses who spent careers playing wives and girlfriends are now centre-stage, and having a blast. "We don't stay in our dressing rooms. We all pile into one and talk about J-Lo, or what food makes us gassy," laughs Leyva.

With three more seasons newly ordered — taking us up to Season 7 — it's clear that this is one *Orange* that won't run out of juice. But given Piper was initially serving a 15-month sentence, that is something the show will have to revise if Schilling's going to stay the course. It seems Season 4 may be taking care of that.

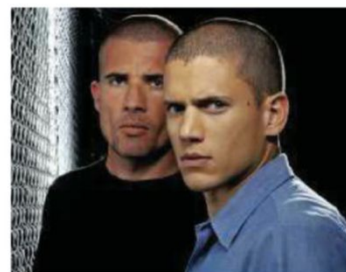
"She's still pushing at her limits," says Schilling. "This season she's going to break through to the other side." Sounds like Piper might be about to break. The Litchfield redemption has been postponed. **SARAH MORGAN**

ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK SEASON 4 IS ON NETFLIX FROM JUNE 17.



BREAKING BACK

PRISON BREAK IS ON THE RUN AGAIN



→ AS ONE SET OF PRISON DOORS open, another... also open. After a hiatus of five years, *Prison Break* — the ludicrously enjoyable Fox TV show about a pair of brothers who travel the world indulging their hobby of absconding from seemingly inescapable fortresses — is back.

Like previous Fox shows *24* and more recently *The X-Files*, *Prison Break* will be enjoying a revival as a limited edition 'event series', and will start shooting in Vancouver soon. Although the show was cancelled after four seasons of increasingly diminishing returns in both storytelling and ratings, there's been a recent surge of interest thanks to the show pitching up on Netflix, and the reunion of Wentworth Miller and Dominic Purcell, who played the brothers at the show's heart, in both *The Flash* and *Legends Of Tomorrow*.

The new show will focus on siblings Michael Scofield (Miller) and Lincoln Burrows (Purcell), along with the returning likes of Sarah Wayne Callies (Sara), Robert Knepper (T-Bag) and new cast member Mark Feuerstein, while the show's creator, Paul Scheuring, is also back on board. Plot details are under wraps, but we're guessing a prison will be involved.

Fans of the show might be intrigued by Miller's involvement. After all, the show ended with Michael biting the dust in fairly unequivocal fashion. Perhaps the prison he's breaking out of could be his coffin. We'll find out when it airs later this year. **CH**



- 1 Taylor Schilling as Piper Chapman receives some direction on set.
- 2 Lorna Morello (Yael Stone) gives Suzanne 'Crazy Eyes' Warren (Uzo Aduba) a talking to.
- 3 Piper with her on-off lover Alex Vause (Laura Prepon).

FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

COMING UP TRUMPS

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR COULD CHANGE THE WORLD



OST SATIRICAL films hide their points about sticking it to The Man under the guise of something completely different.

Let's talk about subtext, baby.

Not *The Purge: Election Year*. The third (and possibly final) part of the low-budget but successful *Purge* trilogy about a near-future America in which all crime is legal for 12 hours once every year, James DeMonaco's movie is about a female politician (Elizabeth Mitchell) who wants to change the system, and is targeted by a hardcore right-wing element. Sound familiar? "I wanted to do genre movies that had a little social commentary," says DeMonaco. "That's what we were doing, sneaking ideas into this genre piece. But we're not sneaking anymore — now we're openly saying shit out loud, and nobody's stopping us!" Subtext is for wimps.

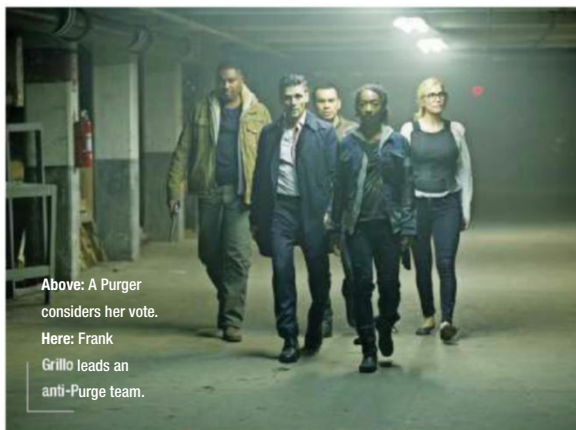
DeMonaco claims that the release of *Election Year* in, well, an American election year is actually serendipitous. "I had no idea it would all tie in timing-

wise with the election," he protests, possibly too much. "That it's coinciding with Trump and Hillary, or whoever it's going to be, is pretty fascinating."

Still, it's a coincidence the film's marketing team is grabbing with both hands — an advert for the movie ran during a recent Republican debate and generated huge buzz. So, does DeMonaco think his movie, which stars Frank Grillo as the badass fighting to save Mitchell and defend democracy, might have an impact on the November election? "Will it have an actual effect on who people vote for? I don't know, but people may be able to blow off some steam," he says. "It's a very stressful time in America. When people see the film the reflection will be clear, how there are parallels between all the characters that are in play right now. Hopefully it'll start a discussion."

Then again, it could have a negative impact. "For the first time, we have someone who would probably look at the *Purge* movies, nod his head and go, 'That's actually a pretty good idea!'" laughs DeMonaco of a certain Republican candidate. "That's terrifying." A real *Purge*? Perhaps the next movie could be a documentary... **CH**

THE PURGE: ELECTION YEAR IS OUT ON JULY 15.



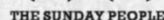
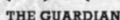
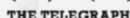
Above: A Purger considers her vote. Here: Frank Grillo leads an anti-Purge team.



Writer-director James DeMonaco on set. He's the one on the left.

Chris Hunnewsett, THE SUNDAY PEOPLE

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FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

ABOUT TIME

ALICE IS BACK — AND FORWARD — IN *THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS*



IT'S BEEN SIX years since Tim Burton's *Alice In Wonderland* became a billion dollar-grossing sensation.

Surprisingly, in this era of instant sequels, it's taken that long for Disney to press the button on a follow-up — but it's finally here in the shape of *Alice Through The Looking Glass*, inspired by, rather than slavishly based on, the Lewis Carroll book of the same name.

"The book is fantastic in its own right," says James Bobin, the British director (*The Muppets*, *Flight Of The Conchords*) who's calling the shots now the previous incumbent has gone for a Burton. "But it's largely based around the game of chess. And Alice meets various people, none of whom have cause and effect, and therefore it doesn't make a great narrative for a film."

Bobin's solution: replace a Tim

with a Time, in the shape of Sacha Baron Cohen. "Time has this great sense of self-importance," says Bobin of the movie's new villain. "Sacha is very good at the comedic trope of the confident idiot." Cohen's Time drives the plot of this brain-bending prequel, as Alice (Mia Wasikowska) ventures into Underland, a place where "time is a geographical construct," says Bobin. "You have to literally move through time, backwards and forwards, to find the place you need to go."

The reason for Alice's quest? To save the family of Johnny Depp's Mad Hatter. "Johnny pushed the character emotionally," says Bobin. Did he have to wear a Tim Burton mask in order to direct Depp, we wonder. "We all had black suits and I had Robert Smith hair," he laughs. "No, I was just me — a British man in a suit." Wonderful. **CHRIS HEWITT**

ALICE THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS IS OUT ON MAY 27.



FIRST LOOK EXCLUSIVE!

WTF IS WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT?

**EMPIRE WATCHES TINA FEY
GO TO WAR**

↓
IN *WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT* (army-alphabetese for “what the fuck?”), Tina Fey plays real-life US journalist Kim Barker, who was sent to the

Middle East as a war correspondent, narrowly avoided being blown up, was propositioned by Pakistan’s former president, and found herself living with fellow journos who lived every day as if it were their last. Because, well, it might have been. It all sounds a bit Oscar-baity. It all sounds like the first serious role for Hollywood’s Queen of Comedy. It all sounds a bit WTF. Thankfully, it isn’t.

“Oh, it’s really funny. It’s a comedy,” says WTF (Wonderful Tina Fey) on the film’s Santa Fe set, standing in for Afghanistan. “This is not truly a war movie, it’s more political. I’m just looking for things where it’s remotely plausible I could be like that person.” She gestures at *Empire*, as the closest thing to a journalist in the vicinity. “I feel like I could fit among you.” Excellent



news — we’ll need 450 words on the film please, Tina, by Monday morning.

The movie is based on Barker’s memoir, *The Taliban Shuffle*, which came to Fey’s attention when she was namechecked in a *New York Times* review. She then optioned the book with *Saturday Night Live* producer Lorne Michaels and grabbed long-term collaborator Robert Carlock (*30 Rock*, *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*) to write, while Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, directors of *Crazy Stupid Love* and *Focus*, lined up behind the camera. Fey gently rebukes Carlock for writing a movie in which she appears in virtually every scene.



"I have to shoot the whole movie!" she says, mock indignant. "The part where I walk to the car. The part where it's the other person talking."

The other people include another reporter (Margot Robbie), who takes Kim under her wing, and a photo-journalist who Kim has a 'holiday' romance with. For this pivotal role, Fey handpicked Martin Freeman.

"We met at a fabulous Hollywood party once, as all actors do," she smiles, "and after the orgy we exchanged emails."

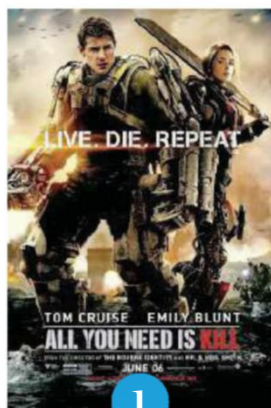
WTF FTW. **OLLY RICHARDS**

WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT IS OUT ON APRIL 22.

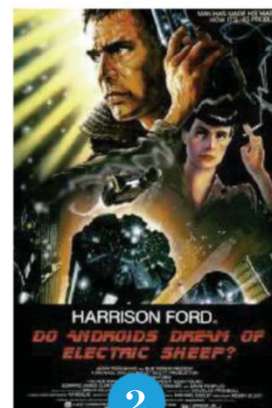
Left: Fey's journalist goes old-school on the frontline, notebook in hand. **Above:** On set with Billy Bob Thornton, who plays Colonel Walter Hollanek.

THE NAME GAME

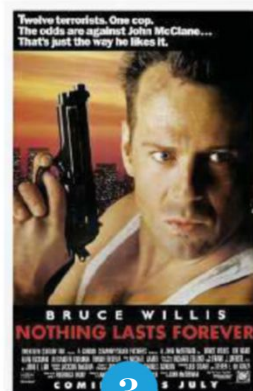
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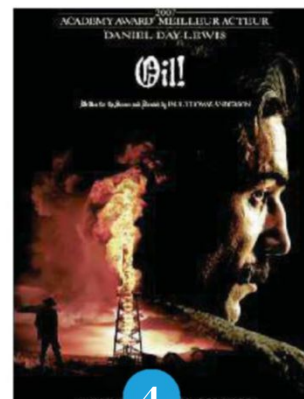
EDGE OF TOMORROW



BLADE RUNNER



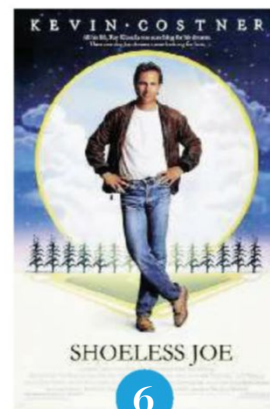
DIE HARD



THERE WILL BE BLOOD



WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT



FIELD OF DREAMS

On a scale of one to ten, how famous are you? I'm a two. The interesting thing about fame is, if Mark Ruffalo and Eamonn Holmes were to walk along Oxford Street or through High Wycombe, I'd imagine Eamonn Holmes would get far more attention and hassle. I was on *Jonathan Ross* at the weekend with Taylor Lautner, who is evidently a big deal, but I'm a 50 year-old man, so hadn't had the fortune for him to touch my life yet. He was a lovely kid, but I'm not a *Twilight* person. I like the chocolates of the same name.

Where's the strangest place you've been recognised? We were canoeing down the Ardèche, a huge gorge in France, and I was getting people shouting across the water to me. It's a family consensus that one man crashed his canoe so I would have to go in and rescue him.

What's your nickname? Some of my friends call me Bobby. You can't get much shorter than Rob.

Who were you in your first school play? Luke Skywalker. We mounted possibly the world's first stage production of *Star Wars* in 1978, maybe, and I took the lead role. I wasn't to realise at that time that the role of Han Solo was actually more coveted. We used toy lightsabers, with batteries in the handle. During the climactic sequence between Obi-Wan and Darth Vader, such was the ferocity of the fight that the lid came off the handle and the batteries rolled cheekily across the stage, slightly taking away from the solemnity of Obi-Wan's demise.

What's your favourite word? I like "abundant". It's nice to say and a bit like being in a stationery shop — it suggests so many possibilities.

Who's the most famous person in your contacts? Elvis Presley. He never calls back.

What's the best thing you've ever stolen from a hotel? There was a quite expensive painting in a hotel in the South of France, but other than that I don't think I've stolen anything.

When did you last care about money? In terms of being worried about not

HOW MUCH IS A PINT OF MILK?

Rob Brydon

THE STAR OF *THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR* ISN'T IN CHARGE OF MILK

PORTRAIT HARRY BORDEN



having enough? Probably the mid-'90s. Well done, me!

When were you most starstruck? Anthony Hopkins and Bruce Springsteen. Separately. When I met Anthony Hopkins, I got a little short of breath.

How much is a pint of milk? My wife is in charge of milk. I'm guessing about 80p.

Do you do your own shopping? Not really. Ocado deliver quite a lot. I'm still a man of the people. Just different people.

Who was your first movie crush? A girl in *Jaws 2*, who I think played a cousin. I've not watched it since I first went to see it in Swansea, but I do remember being taken with a girl who played a cousin in it.

What would you do if you woke up and found you were Bruce Willis? I'd want to know what the hell was going on.

On a scale from one to ten, how hairy is your arse? Probably only a four. It's nothing to write home about, which is a shame, as Mum and Dad used to love those letters. **CHRIS HEWITT**

THE HUNTSMAN: WINTER'S WAR IS OUT ON APRIL 8.

DID YOU KNOW?

David Walliams was an usher at his wedding.

His first movie was 1995's *First Knight*, where he was uncredited as a man in a crowd.

He went to school with Catherine Zeta-Jones.



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Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 12A / 151 MINS.

DIRECTOR Zack Snyder

CAST Ben Affleck, Henry Cavill, Jesse Eisenberg, Gal Gadot, Jeremy Irons, Amy Adams, Holly Hunter, Laurence Fishburne

PLOT In the wake of Zod's assault on Metropolis, Superman (Cavill) is eyed by many with suspicion, not least Lex Luthor (Eisenberg) and Bruce Wayne (Affleck). Both formulate schemes that could see the alien destroyed for good.



IN *THE LEGO MOVIE*, Will Arnett's Batman sang an ode to being glum in Gotham, which included the lyrics, "Darkness! No parents! Continued

darkness! More darkness, get it?" But even he's out-moodied by the iteration in *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*. For those who thought *Man Of Steel* was too gloomy and navel-gazing, we have some bad news: the addition of Bruce Wayne to the franchise has not lightened the mood any. Horribly scarred both inside and out, Ben Affleck's grey-templed Darkest Knight is so morally burned out that he not only subdues foes, but tortures and brands them like cattle. His dreams are plagued by screeching, man-sized bats. Not even the very pleasant water feature



in his lakeside cave cheers him up. There's nothing wrong with a little angst, but here it's doubled down: pitting him against an insecure and self-doubting Superman, Zack Snyder's movie is a spectacle that proves heavy on visual pizzazz but markedly light on fun.

As with other 'versus' films — *Alien Vs. Predator*, *Freddy Vs. Jason*, *Kramer Vs. Kramer Vs. Godzilla* — the title carries a charge of giddy promise. Two titans of pop culture will, we are assured, rearrange city streets with each other's faces. And once it arrives, the fight is a tightly choreographed, berserkly overwrought treat. But talk about delayed gratification: Snyder makes you wait, and wait, and wait for the championship bout. As the colon in the unwieldy title suggests, this is really two movies squished into one. Besides

another run-through of Bruce Wayne's tragic backstory (including an odd nod to John Boorman's *Excalibur*), *Dawn Of Justice* strains to both set up a plausible conflict between the two superheroes, and shift pieces into place for future sequels and spin-offs. It's a film with a lot on its mind.

The main plot starts well enough. A *Rashomon*-style replaying of *Man Of Steel*'s finale through the eyes of Bruce Wayne, as he slaloms through Metropolis in a tiny black car in an effort to rescue his employees, helps us buy into his rage when it comes to Superman. (Could it be that Snyder is channelling all the angry comments he got on message boards about his previous film's destructive finale?) Wayne's pissed, he's paranoid, he's going full Trump. Affleck underplays the role nicely, exuding rumpled world-weariness

Batman knew he shouldn't have left Superman in charge of bringing the brollies.

like only a man who's survived *Gigli* can, and dispelling any lingering memories of Daredevil. Then along comes Jesse Eisenberg's Lex Luthor. Sporting a Banksy T-shirt, chomping on Jolly Ranchers and throwing random "Mmm!"s into his maniacal monologues, the character is going to be an acquired taste — it's not difficult to imagine him popping up in one of the Joel Schumacher Batman films. Less up for discussion are his schemes, which are both numerous and not massively well thought out, despite the fact he frequently appears to be omniscient. One explosive set-piece, in particular, is visually impactful but has no real effect on the story.

For most of its run-time, the film focuses on talk over action — a *Sucker Punch*-ish nightmare sequence, in which Batman takes on Kal-El's super-troopers >

and flying, shotgun-toting bug-men (one of several nods to as-yet-unseen mega-bad'un Darkseid) is a fun if slightly pointless exception. Jeremy Irons proves a fine Alfred, sternly ticking off Bruce and even making lines like, "You've been to deduction what Mozart was to the harpsichord," sound good. Holly Hunter spars with Eisenberg in the thin role of a US Senator, while Scoot McNairy plays a former Wayne Enterprises employee with a grudge against Superman. There are too-short interludes with Clark Kent, who we learn has signed up to Dropbox. It's all very solemn, very operatic, and a bit dull.

It's with an hour to go that *Dawn Of Justice* goes nuts. Following a wonderfully camp training montage in which the Dark Knight furiously pumps Batbarbells and chucks a tyre around, he and Supes go cape-to-cape through the slums of Gotham, a sight to justify the slow and gloomy build-up. There are ultra-sonic blasters, machine-gun turrets, kryptonite grenades, everything but the kitchen sink. (Our mistake: a sink gets smashed on someone's head, too.) It's here at last, amid the crumbling masonry, that the movie discovers its *joie de vivre*. Which is why it's a shame that Snyder feels the need to throw in a hulking, city-smashing Uruk-hai afterwards. A climax to a climax, it's CGI overkill, making for a generic and exhausting denouement.

As for the DC world-building, there's a lot to take in, though much of it amounts to a superhero watching clips of other superheroes on a laptop.

Metahumans are glimpsed — hastily setting the table for next year's *Justice League*, doing in four minutes what took Marvel four years — though, with one trippy exception, they don't actually interact with our principal characters. That honour goes to Gal Gadot's Wonder Woman, a character invented in 1941 and only now making her big-screen debut. Gadot's dramatic powers remain to be tested, but she at least makes a big impact in the final reel's showdown, unleashing her Lasso Of Truth and power-sliding all over the place. It's a landmark moment in cinema, executed well. Still no sign of Dawn, though. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

VERDICT This super-showdown has its moments, not least the titular face-off, which makes the whole enterprise worthwhile, and introduces an intriguing new Batman. But it's also cluttered and narratively wonky; a few jokes wouldn't have gone amiss, either.



Honestly, she was a lazy sod.



The council's Bonfire Night event had gone slightly awry.



Facilities were taking a bloody long time with those chairs.

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DAWN OF JUSTICE
MARCH 25



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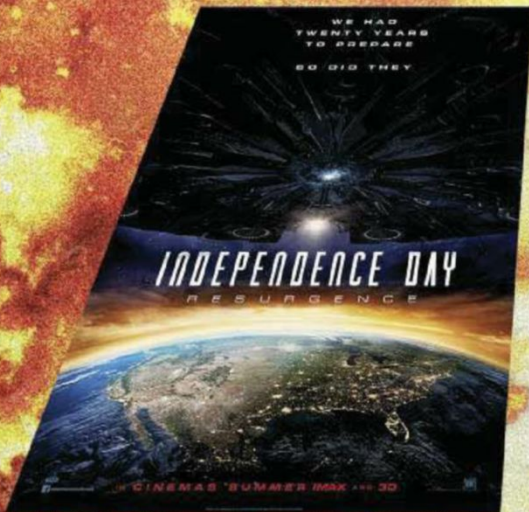
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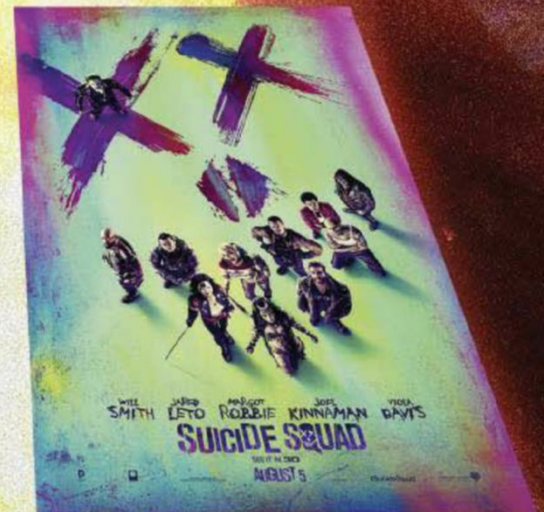
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Her first day at her
new job wasn't
going too well.



10 Cloverfield Lane

★★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 12A / 103 MINS.

DIRECTOR Dan Trachtenberg

CAST Mary Elizabeth Winstead, John Goodman, John Gallagher Jr.

PLOT After a road accident, Michelle (Winstead) wakes up in a bunker with her captor, Howard (Goodman), claiming America's been attacked. She resolves to discover exactly what's going on.



S RECENTLY AS the beginning of 2016, no one had heard of *10 Cloverfield Lane*. For years there was talk of a sequel to 2008 found-footage monster movie *Cloverfield* but it had all but dissipated — starved of new information from J. J. Abrams or director Matt Reeves, people had simply stopped asking them about it. And (in J. J.'s case) they had the small matter of a new *Star Wars* to ask about instead.

In retrospect, given Abrams' history of springing surprises, this actually made it the ideal time for him to unveil a sequel. Or "blood relative", as he's calling it.

Announced via a trailer in January, and out less than two months later, it bears scant similarity to the first film — gone is the found-footage shaky-cam device. And rather than huge effects sequences set across an entire city, the action is claustrophobic — confined to a few cramped rooms underground. Also, there's no giant, city-devouring monster. Unless you count John Goodman.

We open with Michelle (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) fleeing New Orleans and a broken relationship. It's an almost wordless sequence, punctuated only by her ex-boyfriend pleading with her on speakerphone as she drives into the Louisiana night. The near silence is especially effective — the sudden loud crash as her car is rammed is a shock scare to jolt you upright in your seat, the first of several times the film manages that feat.

Michelle wakes up in a sparse room, a drip in her arm, but manacled to a pipe. Alive, but a prisoner. It's here we meet Howard (John Goodman), the man who pulled her from the wreck, but is now her captor. It's his introduction that strains credibility, as he tells her, "I'm sorry, but no-one is looking for you," as she bargains for her release, delaying his reveal of what's really going on: the country's been attacked by enemies unknown but they're safe in the bunker. That information comes later, after an escape attempt and more ominous statements from Goodman, but it's clear she's not in the immediate physical danger she believes she is, which lessens the effect.

But it's the only real misstep. Things pick up immediately as the bunker's third inhabitant, Emmett (John Gallagher Jr.), is introduced and the central conceit presented — is Howard telling the truth (as the evidence initially suggests) or is something more sinister going on? From this point we learn things as Michelle does, and her fear and uncertainty are projected onto us. The best she can hope for is that Howard is a good man, just not particularly 'normal'. But as time passes, it becomes clear there's a darkness in his past that threatens what she's been led to believe. Emmett sees it too, suggesting a potential bucket list to Howard which includes taking "a pilgrimage to Waco".

It's a smaller, more intimate film than the first *Cloverfield* would lead you to expect, but that doesn't mean it's devoid of action. Sequences that see Michelle crawling through ventilation ducts are particularly tense and uncomfortable (no "Come out to the coast, we'll get together, have a few laughs" quipping here). The key to this working is Winstead. Goodman is good in the showiest role, but it's Winstead's film, and she ably takes us with her on her journey of ever-changing emotions.

The impact that journey will have on you depends on how much you already know — the colder you go in, the better. So, see it before someone blurts out its secrets. Good luck. **JONATHAN PILE**

VERDICT Abrams' you-didn't-see-this-coming announcement was an effective piece of theatre, which the film itself ably lives up to. A thriller that winds you tighter and tighter before its secrets come tumbling out in a cathartic finale.



Friend Request

★★★

OUT APRIL 22 / CERT. TBC / 92 MINS.

DIRECTOR Simon Verhoeven

CAST Alycia Debnam-Carey, William Moseley, Connor Paolo, Liesl Ahlers

→ First 2015's *Unfriended*, now this — social media-themed horror is apparently a thing. Here carefree student Laura (Debnam-Carey) accepts a friend request from Marina (Ahlers), a loner she barely knows. It turns out to be a bad idea — her admirer moves from obsessive cyber stalker to e-poltergeist as Laura's friends begin to disappear, and not just from her Facebook feed. A few neat twists keep the plot from stagnating, and *Fear The Walking Dead*'s Debnam-Carey stands out amid otherwise mediocre performances, but the heavily clichéd villain reduces the overall impact. **AW**



The Brand New Testament

★★★

OUT APRIL 15 / CERT. 15 / 112 MINS.

DIRECTOR Jaco Van Dormael

CAST Benoît Poelvoorde, Yolande Moreau, Catherine Deneuve

→ Given that so many movies barely have two ideas to rub together, it seems harsh to criticise Jaco Van Dormael's socio-religious satire for having too many. But things start to drift after it is hilariously established that God (Poelvoorde) is a sadistic maniac taunting humanity with a computer from his Brussels home. The notion that his put-upon wife (Moreau) and spirited daughter (Pili Groyne) should rebel against him is sound enough. But Van Dormael is distracted by six new apostles, not least Deneuve's gorilla-loving housewife. Ingenious, but frustratingly scattershot. **DP**



Miles Ahead

★★★

OUT APRIL 22 / CERT. TBC / 100 MINS.

DIRECTOR Don Cheadle

CAST Don Cheadle, Ewan McGregor, Emayatzy Corinealdi, Michael Stuhlbarg

PLOT After reclusive jazz-trumpet legend Miles Davis (Cheadle) is doorstepped by dodgy music journalist Dave Braden (McGregor), the pair form an unlikely alliance to retrieve a stolen music tape.



YES HIDDEN behind huge sunglasses, his hair wild and long, voice modulated into a rich, husky whisper, Don Cheadle

announces in *Miles Ahead* that "when you're creating your own shit, man... the sky is the limit." And, with this passion project — Cheadle directs for the first time, co-writes (with Steven Baigelman), produces and stars as Miles Davis — he's certainly aimed to push the limits of the biopic.

The hub of the plot is a fictional crime caper set on the streets of late-'70s Manhattan. Cheadle's Davis is frazzled, coke-addicted and apparently creatively spent. It's an engaging portrayal, enlarging this already larger-than-life figure into someone who'll sock a journalist (Ewan McGregor) in the face for using the phrase "comeback piece" before dragging them along on a

gun-toting quest to retrieve a stolen tape of unreleased recordings (Michael Stuhlbarg going full sleaze as the light-fingered record executive).

Interestingly, this is all framed by an apparently unconnected TV interview with Cheadle-as-Davis, the events kicking off as he puts his trumpet to his lips, and concluding as he pulls it away. So the suggestion is he's 'playing' the entire movie: his music being the ideal delivery method for his myth. It's a bold and effective device, and the kind of thing you'd expect from a screenplay with Baigelman's name on it, given he'd already played with the format in the non-linear, James Brown-focused *Get On Up*.

The problem comes when the film segues into flashbacks which depict Davis at his peak two decades earlier and chart his rocky relationship with dancer Frances Taylor (Emayatzy Corinealdi). Presented as '70s Miles clearly looking back on what went wrong with his life, this introduces biopic-by-numbers material and gives Corinealdi little to grapple with beyond the usual wronged-woman clichés. It feels like a token attempt to tell a bigger, more traditional story, taking us on too many dull diversions from an otherwise entertainingly crazed look at a music legend. Cheadle should have fully heeded his own character's counsel: "Come with some attitude, man. Don't get all corny with this shit." **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT A largely inventive and energetic portrayal of a past-their-prime music legend that's let down by its unnecessary trad biopic beats.

Don Cheadle's Miles Davis, about to blow his own trumpet.

Eye In The Sky

★★★★★

OUT APRIL 15 / CERT. 15 / 102 MINS.

DIRECTOR Gavin Hood

CAST Helen Mirren, Aaron Paul, Alan Rickman

PLOT After tracking a group of terrorists, Colonel Powell (Mirren) finally pins them down to a small house in Kenya. She orders a drone strike, but when a little girl is spotted in the kill zone the decision to attack becomes more complicated.



GAVIN HOOD'S Hollywood career has so far been a bit of a non-starter. *Rendition*, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and *Ender's Game*

had some meaty ideas, and were all fantastical takes on the well-meaning pawn in a no-good war, but they were hard to discern among some very dull filmmaking. *Eye In The Sky*, which picks at the same theme, is simpler and much, much swifter. Easily Hood's best work since the Oscar-winning *Tsotsi*.

This is a war movie without most of the genre hallmarks. There's no face-to-face combat, minimal gunfire and the roles of goodies and baddies are ever shifting. It's about modern war, in which life or death decisions aren't made on the battlefield but from miles away, using algorithms and armed drones. Helen Mirren's Colonel Powell finally has the world's most dangerous

terrorists in her sights and wants to blow up the house they're hiding in. A girl selling bread next to the house turns the decision into a global debate, nobody prepared to instruct the finger that will pull the trigger and probably kill an innocent. That trigger is controlled by a drone operator (Aaron Paul) in America. Powell is in a bunker in the British countryside. British government officials are in a plush conference room. The foreign secretary is on the loo. Nobody is in Kenya. They, like us, watch the whole thing on screens, with their hands clean.

Hood, with fluid editing by Megan Gill, keeps the pace breakneck and doesn't let the distance between the characters make it disjointed. It's a moral thriller more than an action one, questions fired at us like so many bullets. Is one assured death worse than 100 probable ones? Does following an order absolve you of responsibility? Who is worse if both sides kill? You're not

Where the hell did she put the shopping list?

allowed to consider one and then the next; you have to juggle all at once. It does a superb job of conveying the difficult decisions Powell, as a soldier, is prepared to make but her superiors pass upwards in case they explode in their hands.

Guy Hibbert's script lets nobody off the hook, including the audience. As one politician blasts Rickman's Lieutenant Benson for even considering killing the girl, he eyes her disgustingly — what a loss he is — and tells her she has the comfort of judging while “watching with coffee and biscuits”, never seeing the consequences up close, like a soldier. Switch the biscuits for popcorn and it's us. Are we fit to judge? **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT It's a tight thriller played out smoothly but tying the viewer in moral knots. A film to think about for days, with little hope of finding a comforting answer.

Eisenstein In Guanajuato

★★★★★

OUT APRIL 15 / CERT. TBC / 105 MINS.

DIRECTOR Peter Greenaway

CAST Elmer Bäck, Luis Alberti, Maya Zapata, Rasmus Slätis

→ A heartfelt and mischievously witty homage to iconic Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, set over ten days in 1931 during a time of deep personal and professional crisis. This is an admiring study of an artist who transformed his medium. Bawdy, bold and beautiful. **PP**

Bastille Day

★★★

OUT APRIL 22 / CERT. 15 / 91 MINS.

DIRECTOR James Watkins

CAST Idris Elba, Richard Madden, Charlotte Le Bon

→ A schlocky action film about terrorist attacks in Paris might seem inappropriate, but the plot — street thief Madden snatches a bag carrying a bomb, and the terrorists use hashtags to coordinate their plan — is too daft to be taken seriously. While it rarely makes sense, you're never bored. **JNU**

Desert Dancer

★★

OUT APRIL 22 / CERT. 15 / 102 MINS.

DIRECTOR Richard Raymond

CAST Reece Ritchie, Freida Pinto

→ Essentially *Footloose* in the Middle East, or 90 minutes of Reece Ritchie doing Bret's angry dance from *Flight Of The Conchords*, this sees Iranian youths defy their government's “morality police” by boogying in secret. It strives to be a rousing tale of rebellion, but the over-earnest result is more of a slow shuffle. **NDS**

ALSO
OUT



Son Of Saul

★★★★★

OUT **APRIL 29** / CERT. 15 / 107 MINS.

DIRECTOR László Nemes

CAST Géza Röhrig, Levente Molnár

→ Debut director László Nemes and first-time actor Géza Röhrig join forces for a mesmerising but harrowing Auschwitz-set drama that won this year's Best Foreign Language film at the Oscars. It follows a member of the camp's Jewish *Sonderkommando* unit in his efforts to afford his son dignity in death. In his path are Nazi doctors, a pervading sense of fatalism and a planned uprising. The inmates' hastily improvised world, with its rituals and own currency, is vividly depicted and the camera's trajectory through the camp's concrete killing zones feels like a ride into hell. Shot in shallow focus, it's a film of disorientating sights and muffled sounds that's more troubling for its half-glimpsed horrors. But at its heart it's a story about morsels of humanity rescued from an unspeakable apocalypse. If there's a film to feel trapped in, this is it. **PDS**



London Has Fallen

★★

OUT **NOW** / CERT. 15 / 99 MINS.

DIRECTOR Babak Najafi

CAST Gerard Butler, Aaron Eckhart, Angela Bassett, Morgan Freeman, Alon Aboutboul

→ A sequel to *Olympus Has Fallen*, the surprise box-office winner (over *White House Down*) in 2013's POTUS-in-peril tussle, with the action (as the title helpfully points out) relocated to London. But what made the first film so effective, the *Die Hard*-like premise of two men in a building with bad guys, feels a bit ridiculous when there's a whole city to hide in. And for a man whose job is keeping his boss alive, Gerard Butler's Agent Banning spends an inordinate amount of time dragging President Asher (Eckhart) from one nest of villains to another rather than, say, stashing him in a branch of WHSmith until the whole thing blows over. Possibly the most daftly plotted action movie of recent years. And that includes *Taken 3*. **PDS**



The Man Who Knew Infinity

★★★

OUT **APRIL 8** / CERT. 12A / 109 MINS.

DIRECTOR Matt Brown

CAST Dev Patel, Jeremy Irons, Toby Jones, Stephen Fry, Jeremy Northam

→ The true story of an unlikely partnership between self-taught Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (Dev Patel) and Cambridge don G. H. Hardy (Jeremy Irons) in Edwardian England. A near-miss attempt at another *The Theory Of Everything*, it plays out like a sports movie with Hardy as Srinivasa's coach, teaching him the need to methodically prove his spontaneous insights. Yet while it nails the racial stuffiness of 1910s England and the difficulty of Srinivasa's achievement, it wastes time in awkward scenes in India where an arranged marriage is fuzzily observed. The exact nature of Srinivasa's ideas is barely sketched, too, which obscures just why he was so great — the equivalent of a film about Miles Davis in which he never picks up a trumpet. **AL**



Boulevard

★★★

OUT **APRIL 8** / CERT. TBC / 88 MINS.

DIRECTOR Dito Montiel

CAST Robin Williams, Kathy Baker, Bob Odenkirk

→ It wasn't easy being a Robin Williams fans in the years leading up to his untimely death in 2014 — it had been more than a decade since he'd made a truly great movie (*One Hour Photo*), while films like *Old Dogs* wasted his talents. It's a bittersweet pleasure, therefore, that in his final on-screen role he turns in one of his best dramatic performances. He's subdued and sympathetic in a sensitive yet admittedly slight study of married middle-aged bank clerk Nolan Mack, whose encounter with a male prostitute forces him to come to terms with his previously repressed sexuality. Stories about middle-aged men making radical life changes are common, but while the script veers dangerously towards movie of the week territory, director Montiel manages to keep it on track. **DH**

DID YOU KNOW?

Panto favourite Christopher Biggins was Jeremy Irons' best man the first time he got married.



DID YOU KNOW?

In high school, Robin Williams was voted 'Least Likely To Succeed' by his peers.





Midnight Special

★★★★★

OUT APRIL 8 / CERT. 12A / 112 MINS.

DIRECTOR Jeff Nichols

CAST Michael Shannon, Joel Edgerton, Kirsten Dunst, Jaeden Lieberher, Adam Driver, Sam Shepard

PLOT Eight year-old Alton (Lieberher), a boy with unearthly abilities, is on the run from both the cult that exploits him and the US government. With the help of his father (Shannon), he must fulfil his destiny.



YOU MAY HAVE missed it amongst all the domestic drama, but there's often been a supernatural tinge to writer-director Jeff Nichols' work. His

last film, *Mud*, teased that its fugitive title character (played by Matthew McConaughey) might be a little more than human, while the man hunting him was described as "the devil his'self" (our attempt at writing an Arkansas accent).

The movie before, *Take Shelter*, conjured vast visions of an apocalypse that may have sprung from the troubled mind of its protagonist (Michael Shannon). Now, in his fourth picture, Nichols finally puts the supernatural front and centre.

As with his previous two films, *Midnight Special* plays with religious themes (perhaps to be expected from a filmmaker raised in the Bible belt). Cosmically gifted/cursed child Alton (Jaeden Lieberher) and his father Roy (Michael Shannon) are fleeing a Christian-ish cult which feeds on Alton's glowy-eyed power. But while the boy's origin is resolutely mysterious, it at least becomes clear he is something other than divine.

Through both his propulsive road-chase plot-engine and lens-flaring visual style, Nichols makes good on his claim that *Midnight Special* is a tribute to John Carpenter's *Starman* and Spielberg's *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*. He's not the first 21st-century filmmaker to draw from the '80s sci-fi well, of course. J. J. Abrams' *Super 8* was an unreserved Amblin tribute, while Rian Johnson's *Looper* riffed on early Cameron and Verhoeven. *Midnight Special* would complement both perfectly on a triple bill, yet it remains distinctly A Jeff Nichols Film, while also proving far more than the sum of its references.

To be honest, the Batcave wasn't quite what they'd expected.

Nichols mounts impressive visual effects and frantic bursts of action; one awesome sequence sees an air-force satellite plucked from orbit and brought down, flaming like a meteorite storm, onto a petrol station. But the film's strength is in its humanity rather than its super-humanity, whether that's being realised by Adam Driver as empathic NSA investigator Sevier, Joel Edgerton as Roy's capable, conscience-driven partner-in-crime Lucas, or Shannon and Lieberher at the story's heart. It's a shame, though, that Kirsten Dunst's role as Alton's mother, Sarah, is frustratingly underwritten — almost as if the character were shoehorned in late in the writing process, as Nichols realised how male-dominated his film was.

For all Nichols' mastery of the genre flourishes, from Alton's incandescent glare to a dazzling final-act reveal, *Midnight Special* doesn't hit harder than one intimate moment when Alton begs his dad to stop fretting about him, and Roy replies, "I like worrying about you." After all, this is really just a story about the joy and pain of parenthood, something you certainly won't miss amid the pyrotechnics and celestial visions. **DAN JOLIN**

VERDICT Soulful sci-fi. A tribute to '80s classics, but with a 21st-century twist: *Close Encounters* of a new kind.



Couple In A Hole

★★★

OUT APRIL 8 / CERT. 12A / 105 MINS.

DIRECTOR Tom Geens

CAST Paul Higgins, Kate Dickie, Jérôme Kircher

→ You can't fault this faintly absurdist thriller's title for accuracy: British expats Karen (Dickie) and John (Higgins) live in a cave in the Pyrenees. As their story is slowly revealed, further suspense comes from the hint that they may rejoin the real world, something a kindly local farmer (Kircher) is keen to promote as winter approaches. The first hour is riveting and darkly funny thanks to the grubby details of daily survival and food sourcing (they'd fare well on *I'm A Celebrity...*) but the ending disappoints both in style and substance. Still, it's a great calling card for writer-director Tom Geens and further proof of the lead actors' talents. **ALS**



The Last Man On The Moon

★★★★

OUT APRIL 8 / CERT. PG / 96 MINS.

DIRECTOR Mark Craig

CAST Eugene Cernan, Alan Bean

→ Shockingly, the gap between now and 1972's final Apollo mission is roughly that between then and the 1929 Wall Street crash. This documentary, which records Apollo 17 commander (and last man on the moon) Eugene Cernan's testimony on film, presents the usual mind-blowing footage from NASA, but is also refreshingly frank on how the brave men involved weren't perfect, and how Cernan's relentless focus led to a failed marriage and strained relationship with his daughter. In allowing a chink to emerge in an astronaut's superhuman façade, it asks the question most examinations miss: was the Apollo programme worth it? **AL**



Demolition

★★★★

OUT APRIL 29 / CERT. 15 / 101 MINS.

DIRECTOR Jean-Marc Vallée

CAST Jake Gyllenhaal, Naomi Watts, Chris Cooper, Heather Lind, Judah Lewis

PLOT After his wife (Lind) is killed, banker Davis Mitchell (Gyllenhaal) demolishes his worldly goods and forms a mysterious bond with a complaints department secretary (Watts) and her son (Lewis).



OLLOWING THE Tex-Mex drug scams of *Dallas Buyers Club* and 1,000-mile mountain ramble of *Wild*, death-fixated indie middleweight

Jean-Marc Vallée has now completed a bizarre-responses-to-grief trilogy. In this case, financial hotshot Davis (Jake Gyllenhaal) reacts to the sudden death of his wife by taking up amateur demolition. Household appliances, his office computer, a cubicle door, even his palatial show-home (which he bulldozes to the ground) — nothing is safe as he dismantles the remnants of his once-perfect life.

Spaced out and hard to classify, Vallée's study of the infinite variety of the human soul alights on a quirky, almost comic vibe, challenging us to laugh. And we do — nervously — thanks to Gyllenhaal's disturbingly upbeat presence. There is something

compellingly inappropriate about the hyperactive widower turning a serial killer's eye on his father-in-law's treasured grandfather clock. The ever-excellent Chris Cooper puts his peerless glower to fine use as a decent but old-fashioned man fast approaching the end of his tether.

Yet, Davis is less unhinged than refocused, as if closing down his heart has awoken his senses and he has become a tuning fork for all that is counterfeit in the world. "For some reason everything has become a metaphor," he writes in one of his letters of general grievance to a vending-machine customer complaints department which, in similar fashion to *About Schmidt*, double as a voiceover. This is how he meets Karen (Naomi Watts) — a low-flying company secretary with a sexually confused teenage son (the charismatic Judah Lewis). Initially it seems she could be the one to bring him back to normality, until it's revealed she's also a fraught soul, insulating herself from the world by staying permanently stoned.

If there is an actual point to all of this, it remains elusive, largely because Vallée's nerve falters. Hastily seeking to remedy Davis' mental renovation, the aloof but mesmerising *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*-like groove ends up giving in to safe Hollywood blandness. A shame. **IAN NATHAN**

VERDICT Vallée's post-traumatic stress comedy is more scientific than moving. Nevertheless, Gyllenhaal continues his post-*Nightcrawler* upgrade with another vivid performance in the key of strange.

It was another controversial appointment to the new *Top Gear* team.

Victoria



OUT **APRIL 1** / CERT. **15** / 138 MINS.

DIRECTOR Sebastian Schipper

CAST Laia Costa, Frederick Lau, Franz Rogowski

PLOT *Victoria* (Costa) is a young Spanish woman newly arrived in Berlin. Bumping into a group of local youths, she accepts their invite to hang out — with surprising, even dangerous, consequences.



O-ONE **LIKES** a spoiler, but when it comes to co-writer/director Sebastian Schipper's extraordinary film, one reveal it pays

to know about in advance is that it was shot in one take. All two hours, 18 minutes of it. For, so faultlessly is it executed, if you didn't know, you might not even realise. And it's something worth appreciating, because it's not as though Schipper limits the scope of the action. Shifting from club dance floor to street to late-night shop to apartment block to — well, you get the point — the plot moves cast and crew across seven locations; even, at one point, taking them up a ladder, with nary a judder. And they only had to restart filming twice.

We first meet Victoria (Laia Costa) dancing alone (but quite happily) in a Berlin club, the beats pounding and

lights strobing to dizzying effect. Leaving, she bumps into four local lads loitering outside who invite her to be shown round the “real” Berlin. She accepts, and so begins an off-kilter adventure that brings to mind *Before Sunrise* — if Ethan Hawke's Jesse had been of considerably more dubious character.

The original script for *Victoria* was just 12 pages long; most two-hour screenplays come in at around 120. Providing the cast with a story arc and character outlines, improvisation from the talented young actors fleshed out the rest. The result is a raft of naturalistic, utterly convincing performances from all, but particularly Costa as the smart, fun, unpredictable Victoria and Frederick Lau as Sonne, unofficial gang leader but with a soft, sensitive soul hidden beneath the cocky bluster. Instantly drawn to each other — even as all the boys josh for her attention — there's a sense that, once this crazy

She'd hit a Berlin wall.

night is over, they could have something special. Behind the camera, the work of cinematographer Sturla Brandth is astonishing — despite the technical demands of shooting just one take, often on the move, in and out of cars, up and down stairs, he never sacrifices careful framing and composition. In acknowledgement of that, his name appears before director Schipper's in the credits.

Of course, innovation is for nothing if the content isn't there. Happily, not only is *Victoria* a thoroughly engaging character piece, once Berlin starts to reveal its darker nooks and crannies, it transforms into a cracking thriller that confounds at every turn. **LIZ BEARDSWORTH**

VERDICT So much more than a one-take gimmick movie, *Victoria* is a stunning cinematic achievement. Full of twists that feel authentic and believable characters, it grips from the first compelling frame to the last.

Mapplethorpe: Look At The Pictures

★★★

OUT **APRIL 22** / CERT. **18** / 108 MINS.

DIRECTORS Randy Barbato, Fenton Bailey

CAST Debbie Harry, Fran Leibowitz, Brooke Shields, Edward Mapplethorpe

→ The life of controversial American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe is put under the lens by directors Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, who deftly capture his dogged journey to turn pornography into an art form. **ET**

Ratchet And Clank

★★

OUT **APRIL 29** / CERT. **PG** / 94 MINS.

DIRECTORS Kevin Munroe, Jericca Cleland

CAST (VOICES) James Arnold Taylor, David Kaye, Jim Ward, Sylvester Stallone

→ This disappointing gaming adaptation tells the story of Lombax (a cat-like alien) hero Ratchet (Taylor) and robotic sidekick Clank (Kaye) as they join the Galactic Rangers to defeat evil Chairman Drek. An impressive voice cast, but a below-par animation. More clunk than Clank. **AW**

Papusza

★★★

OUT **APRIL 1** / CERT. **TBC** / 131 MINS.

DIRECTORS Joanna Kos-Krauze, Krzysztof Krauze

CAST Jowita Budnik, Zbigniew Walerys

→ Beautifully photographed and meticulously recreating the lost world of Poland's post-War Roma community, this is more an ethnographic study than the biopic of the folk poet Bronisława Wajs it purports to be. Intriguing, but never compelling. **DP**

ALSO
OUT



Dheepan

★★★★

OUT APRIL 8 / CERT. 15 / 115 MINS.

DIRECTOR Jacques Audiard

CAST Jesuthasan Antonythasan, Kalieaswari Srinivasan, Claudine Vinasithamby

→ Jacques Audiard announced himself with *Rust And Bone* and *A Prophet*, but this earned him the Palme D'Or. Deservedly, it turns out. A timely look at the desperate plight of three Sri Lankan refugees fleeing civil war for supposed safety in Paris, they instead encounter comparable violence from local gangs. Audiard never loses sight of the small lives in this big story — not just the immigrants but the *banlieues* thugs who become their tormentors. Amidst the violence is a quieter tale of stoic optimism, played beautifully by Jesuthasan Antonythasan and Kalieaswari Srinivasan — often enemies but always allies — and if the denouement skirts with sentiment, it's a heartening reminder that hope can sometimes be wrested from the deepest despair. **LB**



Grimsby

★

OUT NOW / CERT. 15 / 83 MINS.

DIRECTOR Louis Leterrier

CAST Sacha Baron Cohen, Mark Strong, Rebel Wilson, Penélope Cruz

→ Done well, bad-taste comedy can shake a laugh from even the most reserved minds. But then there are also tastes so bad, they just make you want to retch. That's *Grimsby*, which puts all its emphasis on shock and none on genuine provocation. Sacha Baron Cohen is Nobby — a slobbish father of nine — who, as a child, was separated from his brother Sebastian (Mark Strong), now a spy. Following a series of Nobby-triggered disasters, the two have to work together to save the world. The outrageous, stomach-churning jokes that follow might work if they weren't so misanthropic. And despite all the bodily fluids, it's a deeply conservative film that champions patriotism and mindless violence. It's hard to imagine anything less daring. **HOH**



The Sweeney: Paris

★★

OUT APRIL 15 / CERT. TBC / 92 MINS.

DIRECTOR Benjamin Rocher

CAST Jean Reno, Caterina Murino, Alban Lenoir, Thierry Neuvic, Jakob Cedergren

→ You know that French remake of Ray Winstone's 2012 *The Sweeney* movie you were clamouring for? Finally, it's arrived. Jean Reno takes the role of Buren (previously Regan, previously played by Winstone and, further back, John Thaw), the head of a Parisian police commando squad hunting a gang of armed jewellery thieves and dealing with a new boss who doesn't approve of his gun-toting methods. So far, so *Sweeney* (though the relocation makes the rhyming slang — Flying Squad/Sweeney Todd null and void). The gun battles are well staged (if set in a weirdly empty city), but there are few twists on the way to the team's inevitable victory-by-shootout. **JP**



The Divergent Series: Allegiant

★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 12A / 121 MINS.

DIRECTOR Robert Schwentke

CAST Shailene Woodley, Theo James, Miles Teller, Jeff Daniels, Naomi Watts

→ By presenting a future based around the equivalent of *Cosmo* personality quizzes (Shailene Woodley: mainly Cs) and made up of people with no surnames, *Divergent* didn't begin with the most lucid of premises. *Insurgent* muddled things further and *Allegiant* adds yet another layer of mythology to flummox and bamboozle. Jeff Daniels' Bureau Of Genetic Welfare heralds a eugenics überplot, which escalates the conflict at the expense of internal logic and good sense. What's worse, Shailene Woodley's Tris is largely ignored, relegated to bovine acquiescence while Theo James' Four unravels the whole conspiracy. With the finale's second half, *Ascendant*, still to come, this is Competent but neither Consistent nor particularly Coherent. **JD**

DID YOU KNOW?

Jean Reno was Moroccan-born, to Spanish parents. His birth name was Juan Moreno y Herrera-Jiménez.



DID YOU KNOW?

Shailene Woodley wore a back brace for two years during her teens to correct her spine's curvature.



Eddie The Eagle

★★★★★

OUT APRIL 1 / CERT. PG / 106 MINS.

DIRECTOR Dexter Fletcher

CAST Taron Egerton, Hugh Jackman, Christopher Walken

PLOT Based on the true story of Eddie Edwards (Egerton), a plumber from Cheltenham who had dreams of making it to the Winter Olympics, as Great Britain's first-ever Olympic ski jumper.



HEY SAY THAT God loves a trier. If that's true then Eddie 'The Eagle' Edwards will be guaranteed a seat at Heaven's top table when he

eventually skids off his mortal coil. At the 1988 Winter Olympics, Edwards became the first person ever to represent Great Britain in ski jumping, which is not to say he was any good at it. It's no spoiler to say he was not victorious. Far from it. Yet Edwards came home a hero, no medals weighing him down as he was hoisted on the nation's collective shoulder.

Dexter Fletcher has turned Edwards' story into a comedy of soaring delights, a sports movie where it's the taking part that genuinely counts. Through *Wild Bill* and *Sunshine On Leith*, Fletcher has shown himself to be a director who likes to hope for a happy ending, whatever gloom might block it from view, which makes

him the ideal match for this material.

There is an easier film that could have been made here, one that played Edwards' failures for laughs. He is inherently easy to mock, watching from behind bottle-thick glasses as everyone in his field sails beyond his abilities. Yet the would-be Olympian is very rarely the butt of the joke, at least for the audience. He is lauded not because he might win, but because he achieves his dreams by his own hard work.

As a physically disabled child, Edwards doesn't accept that competing in the Olympics could be beyond him. When he finds a sport that might get him there he doesn't accept that the UK team doesn't want him. It's all much more exciting than if he achieved his goals through natural talent. Some of the story is fabricated, like the entirely fictional coach (Hugh Jackman) settling old scores, but there's no damage done by the half-truths. The point is what Edwards did, not who helped him on

Doc Brown and Marty would be well jealous.

the way. The inventions, by debut screenwriters Sean Macaulay and Simon Kelton, slot happily with the truth, while Fletcher has a ball playing with the standards of the sports movie: training montages, bullying rivals, the lot.

Taron Egerton is charm personified as Eddie, managing not to caricature his eccentricities, while Jackman makes a great foil, playing about a seven on his scale of gruff irritation, if we're taking Wolverine as a ten. They sell their relationship so hard that by time it comes to Eddie's big moment, teetering at the top of a potential fatal drop, you're willing him, internally screaming him, to victory even though you know there's no chance. As a man he may never have made the podium, but as a movie, *Eddie The Eagle* flies. **OLLY RICHARDS**

VERDICT *Eddie The Eagle* turns a long-running joke of British sport into a crowd-pleasing story of inspiration. It's a solid-gold winner.

Golden Years

★★★

OUT APRIL 29 / CERT. TBC / 93 MINS.

DIRECTOR John Miller

CAST Bernard Hill, Virginia McKenna

→ Knowingly played by a seasoned cast, this comic caper about OAPs robbing West Country banks to top up their pensions and save their bowls club has an Ealingesque charm. But, while it consistently amuses, a couple of subplots involving the investigating cop feel forced, while the social critique lacks bite. **DP**

Despite The Falling Snow

★★

OUT APRIL 15 / CERT. 12A / 93 MINS.

DIRECTOR Sharmim Sarif

CAST Rebecca Ferguson, Sam Reid, Charles Dance, Antje Traue

→ In Cold War Moscow, spy Katya (Ferguson) is assigned to prise secrets from politician Alexander (Reid) then, 30 years later, his niece returns to discover her fate. An espionage-tinged romance better suited to the small screen. **IF**

I Am Belfast

★★★

OUT APRIL 8 / CERT. TBC / 84 MINS.

DIRECTOR Mark Cousins

CAST Helena Bereen, Mark Cousins

→ Mark Cousins tours his hometown for a documentary that says as much about its maker as Northern Ireland's capital. But the sentiments are sincere and reflections on its troubled past are balanced and tinged with optimism. Moreover, the lyrical imagery atones for occasional lapses into purple prose. **PP**

ALSO
OUT



Whiskey Tango Foxtrot

★★★★

OUT APRIL 22 / CERT. 15 / 112 MINS.

DIRECTORS Glenn Ficarra, John Requa

CAST Tina Fey, Margot Robbie, Martin Freeman, Billy Bob Thornton

PLOT In 2003, cable TV underling Kim Barker (Fey) travels to Afghanistan to work as a frontline war reporter and is slowly entranced by the thrill of the battlefield.

ESPITE HAVING a cupboardful of Emmys, Tina Fey arguably hasn't quite found big-screen work to match her TV hits. *Whiskey*

Tango Foxtrot, written by her regular collaborator Robert Carlock, mostly succeeds in its aim to set this right. Based on blackly comic 2011 memoir *The Taliban Shuffle*, it tells the true story of Kim Barker (Fey) — a jobbing cable news reporter who, at the advent of the Iraq War in 2003, swaps her airless New York cubicle for a new life reporting from the frontline in Afghanistan.

So begins a kind of *Zero Dark 30 Rock*, as Barker — a catastrophically inexperienced klutz with a sniper-friendly bright-orange rucksack — feels her way

into a world of hard-drinking adrenalin-junkie journalists, who have turned Kabul's bullet-ridden buildings into their own personal frat houses. Here in 'the Kabubble', while trying not to breathe in air that we're cheerfully told is "mostly faeces", she encounters an alternative family, ranging from frenemy British reporter Tanya (Margot Robbie) to raffishly obnoxious Scottish photojournalist Iain (Martin Freeman).

The first hour — an effective juxtaposition of raucous partying and battlefield tension — is by far the strongest section of the film, playfully running with the fish-out-of-water conceit and packing in laughs alongside action that's impressively composed by directing duo Glenn Ficarra and John Requa. Carlock's script is well stocked with fast, sharp one-liners and zippily conveys Barker's three-year journey from frightened newbie to battle-hardened thrill-seeker.

However, the tonal gearshifts — from broad *M*A*S*H* update to serious examination of war and addiction — occasionally induce whiplash. And later attempts to tally the emotional cost of Barker's transformation don't always feel earned. That said, the lasting impression is of a smart, commendably complex comedy that finally translates some of Fey's snarky small-screen potency to the cinema. **JIMI FAMUREWA**

VERDICT Comedy for grown-ups that sometimes struggles with its ambitious brief, but always remembers that the best laughs contain the odd shard of shrapnel.

He was furious she'd forgotten to bring Babybels and mini sausages.

AT A GLANCE



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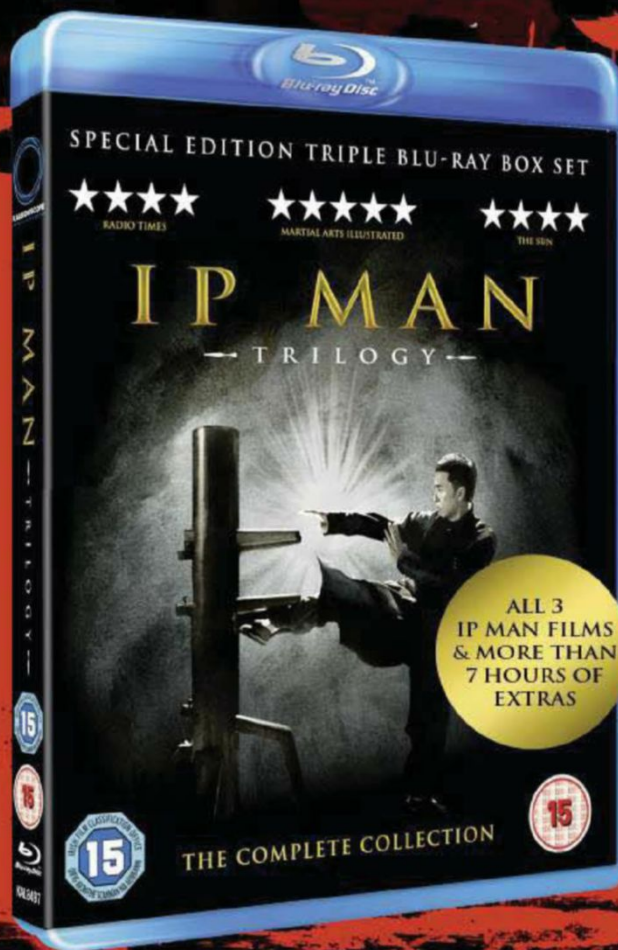
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THE MASTER RETURNS

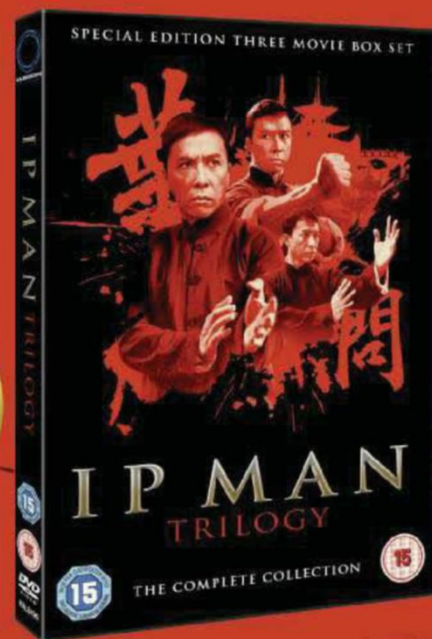
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—X—


A P O C A L Y P S E

THE SIXTH X-MEN MOVIE SEES SAGA-ORIGINATOR BRYAN SINGER PUSHING THE MUTANT MAYHEM TO TRULY EPIC LEVELS, AND INTRODUCES ITS BIGGEST VILLAIN YET: THE APTLY NAMED APOCALYPSE

N O W

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT





Michael Fassbender's
Magneto, post-
Four Horsemen
augmentation.

MAGNETO. It's always Magneto.

Since 2000, when Bryan Singer first turned the X-Men from comic-book heroes into a big-screen franchise, numerous villains have attempted to terrorise Professor Charles Xavier and his team of mutants over the course of five movies. But in the end, whether it's Kevin Bacon's Sebastian Shaw, or Peter Dinklage's Bolivar Trask, or the Sentinels, they've always been superseded by one man. It always comes down to Magneto, standing alone, indomitable, sneering at the X-Men. Come and have a go if you think you're hard enough.

So, as Singer and his writer/producer Simon Kinberg were dotting the Xs and crossing the Xs on 2014's *Days Of Future Past*, in which you-know-who ultimately, once again, becomes the true villain of the piece, they started looking ahead to the next X-installment. And there was one thing they knew they wanted to do: introduce a new nemesis so powerful, so domineering, that the focus would finally shift away from the metal-bending menace in the purple helmet.

Scour through the X-Men's rogues gallery, built up over 50-plus years of the Marvel comic book, and you'd find plenty



of viable candidates. But there was only one Apocalypse.

Created in 1986 by writer Louise Simonson and artist Jackson Guice for the pages of *X-Factor* (not the TV talent show but a comic which turned the original X-Men team into, essentially, mutant detectives), Apocalypse is a noteworthy foe for all kinds of reasons. He's no pushover in the powers department. He has a striking look: all cables, muscles and blue-grey skin. He surrounds himself with powerful bodyguards known as the Four Horsemen. He has a Darwinist ideology that means trouble for humans and

mutants alike. "I think there was a great similarity in terms of character, agenda and thematics in Sebastian Shaw, in *X-Men: First Class*, and Magneto," says Singer. "But with Apocalypse, it's a much more mythic kind of villain."

But what really appealed to Singer was Apocalypse's background. Born in Egypt (his real name is En Sabah Nur; Apocalypse is just a nickname given to him by his gym buddies), he's incredibly ancient. In fact, he's the first mutant, bestowed with a God complex so huge he thinks he might actually be the real thing. "I'm fascinated by religion and >

TEAM
X

SOPHIE TURNER is JEAN GREY

Are you an actor? Do you want to increase your chances of appearing in an *X-Men* movie? Then there's one sure-fire way to catch Bryan Singer's eye: appear in *Game Of Thrones*. With Peter Dinklage (aka Tyrion Lannister) having played *Days Of Future Past*'s chief rotter, Bolivar Trask, Singer has raided Westeros again for *Apocalypse*, casting Sansa Stark herself, Sophie Turner, as the new Jean Grey. "I met Bryan in London," recalls Turner. "He was super-jetlagged, but when he saw my CV he was like, 'Fucking *Game Of Thrones*!' That perked him up. He's a big fan."

It's a surprise Turner wasn't already on Singer's wishlist for this youthful version of the powerful telepath, originally played by Famke Janssen. Tall, red of hair, formidable of disposition, she ticks all of Jean's boxes, something of which Turner was well aware. "I was getting a ton of tweets from people saying, 'You should audition for Jean Grey,'" she says. "I was going, 'I guess the red hair could work...'"

So began a casting process that Turner calls "the most painful three months of my life". Still, she can laugh about it now. "I wanted it so bad," she says. "Every day I was checking the internet to see if anyone had been cast. Then Bryan announced it on his Twitter, which was amazing." She had to endure a further delay while Fox and HBO tried to juggle her conflicting schedules to allow her to film both *Game Of Thrones* and *X-Men: Apocalypse* at the same time. "My loyalty lies with *Thrones*, but it was really good of *X-Men*," she says. "They squeezed themselves around it. I don't know how they did it."

Turner faces the intriguing prospect of having her life be dominated by both for the foreseeable future. "I must have a thing for signing long contracts," she laughs. "It's very difficult having to audition and only getting one in 20 roles. So when you get multiple movies or multiple seasons? Snap that up real quick!"



TEAM X

TYE SHERIDAN *is* CYCLOPS

Most actors, when they get cast in a comic-book movie, spend weeks — months, even — pulling out all the stops in training, honing their bodies so they can perfectly recreate their character's signature combat move. That wasn't quite the case for Tye Sheridan. As Scott Summers, aka Cyclops, whose mutant power is shooting beams from his eyes, "I basically have to take my glasses off," he laughs. "And that's it. I didn't know if I was going to be able to handle it."

Of course, there's more to playing Cyclops than meets the energy-blasting eye. Though we encounter him as a troubled teenager, brought to Charles Xavier by his big brother Alex (Lucas Till), Scott will become the X-Men's leader, Jean Grey's beloved and — as Wolverine remarked of the James Marsden vintage in *X-Men* — "a dick".

"It's very much an origin story for Cyclops," says Sheridan. "We learn things about him we didn't know before. I do think he's an alpha dog. He likes to be on top."

Sheridan calls it "a dream to become part of this franchise", yet incredibly the *X-Men* franchise had passed him by. *Days Of Future Past* was the first one he saw, and as luck would have it, that was only a couple of days before he heard of auditions for *Apocalypse*. "When I was a kid, I never really watched a lot of films," he says. "I grew up in the middle of nowhere, basically. It wasn't super-easy to see films. I still haven't seen quite a few classics."

So far, the 19-year-old's tastes have gravitated towards the arthouse. Recently, he's worked with the likes of Jeff Nichols (*Mud*) and David Gordon Green (*Joe*), but he had a doozy of a debut: working on *The Tree Of Life* for one Terrence Malick. "I was 11 years old when I shot that film," recalls Sheridan, who played one of the sons of Brad Pitt and Jessica Chastain. "People think Terry's style is unique, and it is. But it's the first style I ever experienced, and in some odd sense, *that* will always feel normal to me."



cults and the cult of personality," explains Singer, sitting behind his desk in his Montreal production office. "And what an ancient mutant would be, and what *Apocalypse* would consider himself and be considered by others. I thought it was a good character to explore. Plus, it's a cool title."

THAT COOL title, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, was announced in December 2013, months before *Days Of Future Past* was even completed. It was a bold move, one which showed the level of confidence Fox, Singer and Kinberg had in the direction of the franchise. *Days Of Future Past*, they felt, would take the series to a new level (correctly; the movie grossed \$748 million worldwide) and trigger aggressive expansion. *Apocalypse* — the sixth 'main series' *X-Men* film to date — has been precision-tooled as the biggest in the series, with a budget in the region of \$250 million. It has the widest scope, with the action flitting from Cairo to New York, East Berlin to Poland. And, thanks to the big blue baddie at its heart, it has the biggest bangs.

X-Men has never wanted for spectacle, even if that has mostly involved Magneto (yes, that guy again) lifting something heavy like the Golden Gate Bridge or the RFK Stadium and dropping it on something else. Each film

has felt like a gradual progression — this is a series that has emphasised evolution over escalation. Why have people in capes punching each other through buildings when you can have a philosophical clash?

That will change with the arrival of *Apocalypse*, whose immense power will lead to mass destruction, but who also isn't above an old-fashioned debate with Charles Xavier and Erik Lehnsherr. And his philosophy can be summed up thus: you can't make an omelette without breaking several billion eggs. "We've never done one of these movies where the threat from the villain is global and extinction-level. For the first time it is," says Kinberg. "If you have a movie about a character called *Apocalypse*, you have to embrace that it could actually be the apocalypse."

It's not so much a case of *Apocalypse Now*, though, more *Apocalypse Then*. As with *X-Men: First Class* and *Days Of Future Past*, this movie is set earlier than the original X-trilogy. Jumping forward a decade from the last film, the action takes place in 1983. In this alt-history, mutants — previously society's most dangerous secret — have been out and proud ever since Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) saved the life of President Nixon in full view of the world's media on the White House lawn. "They're part of society and part of culture," says





Top: Apocalypse (Oscar Isaac), lying down on the job.
Above: Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) utilises Cerebro as Cyclops' bro Alex/Havok (Lucas Till) lurks behind.

Singer. "Here, they're almost accepted."

So, at his family mansion in Westchester, New York, the incredibly powerful telepath Charles Xavier (James McAvoy) is running his School For Gifted Youngsters, along with his trusty companion Hank McCoy/Beast (Nicholas Hoult). Meanwhile, Mystique (Jennifer Lawrence) works to free mutants from slavery and exploitation. As for Erik (Michael Fassbender), despite becoming the world's most wanted man, he's managed to find a life of peace and solitude in Poland.

Into their world comes Apocalypse, fresh from a millennium-long

EVOLUTIONARY LEAPS

LEGENDARY *THE UNCANNY X-MEN* AUTHOR **CHRIS CLAREMONT** PICKS HIS FIVE KEY STORY ARCS

WORDS **DORIAN LYNKEY**



THE DARK PHOENIX SAGA (*THE UNCANNY X-MEN*, #129-138, 1980)

"Anyone can write a story about people hitting people," says Claremont. "But to try to make it meaningful and relevant, that's a gamechanger." After taking over the title, he aimed to "keep everyone guessing". His boldest move was turning Jean Grey into the planet-annihilating Dark Phoenix, before killing her off. "We established for the readers that our heroes were at legitimate risk," he says. Many weren't happy. "Frank Miller and I kept notes because Frank got death threats when he killed off Elektra and I got death threats when I killed off Phoenix."



DAYS OF FUTURE PAST (*THE UNCANNY X-MEN*, #141-142, 1981)

The socially conscious Claremont used mutants as a metaphor for other marginalised groups. "Their struggle is not simply to defeat the bad guys, it's to establish themselves as honourable fellow citizens of the planet," he says. This dystopian narrative imagined a future (2013!) of mutant genocide at the hands of giant robots the Sentinels. "The idea was to show our heroes why their fight is so necessary," says Claremont. How did it feel sentencing beloved characters to harrowing deaths? "Crass as it may sound, it was incredibly cool."



I, MAGNETO... (*THE UNCANNY X-MEN* #150, 1981)

As a student in 1970, Claremont spent two months on an Israeli kibbutz. His conversations with Holocaust survivors informed Magneto's World War II backstory. Claremont considers Magneto's relationship with former friend Charles Xavier and his evolution into "an angry anti-human, pro-mutant terrorist" to be one 150-issue arc, but picks this issue for its flash of self-awareness. "He lashes out and hits Kitty Pryde, a 13 year-old kid. His shattering realisation is: 'What kind of monster have I become? Has what the Nazis did to me made me a Nazi?'"



THE JAPAN SAGA (*WOLVERINE* #1-4, 1982)

Ornery Canadian Wolverine developed rock-star charisma after artist John Byrne replaced Dave Cockrum in 1977. "John bonded with Logan," says Claremont. "They were both Canadian and they both felt like outsiders." But it was Frank Miller who drew Logan's first solo story, a tale of love and honour in Japan, which inspired 2013 movie *The Wolverine*. "It got to the heart and soul of Wolverine," says Claremont. "The conflict between the animal side and the desire to be as purely human and under control as any Japanese samurai."



MUTANT MASSACRE

(*THE UNCANNY X-MEN* #210-213 AND OTHERS, 1986)

With Louise and Walter Simonson, Claremont created an unprecedented crossover in which various mutant teams (and Thor) try to save subterranean mutant community the Morlocks from the murderous Marauders. "We wanted to thin down the herd," says Claremont. "One of the things that makes the X-Men so crucial is they're relatively small in number but can have a tremendous impact." Huge sales made such crossovers an annual event, with 1990's *X-Tinction Agenda* featuring a guy named Apocalypse...



slumber. Everyone's grumpy when they've just woken up, and Apocalypse is no exception. Quickly deciding that modern society is too decadent and corrupt, he declares that the world will need to be remade. And who better to take on the job than God?

"He's someone who's been able to go from age to age collecting and growing his consciousness, and feeling that he is the steward of humanity and evolution," explains Apocalypse himself, aka Oscar Isaac. "That language — 'I am God' — is just a very rudimentary way of explaining, 'I am.' That is the God of the Old Testament."

And Apocalypse has a very particular set of Godlike skills; skills that make him a nightmare for people like the X-Men. Not only can he control technology, teleport, and enhance the abilities of his chosen Horsemen, but "he can move inanimate matter," explains Singer. "He can dissolve, change, and transform inanimate molecules. The end becomes an all-out battle with a force that's very formidable. He's a hard man to break."

By way of illustration, Singer shows *Empire* an incomplete but still startling scene that involves the use of that power on an awesome scale, as entire buildings are slowly reduced to their component

Parts of the movie take place thousands of years ago in Egypt.





Next time Beast (Nicholas Hoult) would remember to check the mirror before pulling out.

parts, the particles flying off to reassemble somewhere, for some dark purpose. "Apocalypse creates a giant global problem," Singer says, "and has to be dealt with on a global level." Evolution has finally given way to escalation.

IF HE was to deliver the end of the world, Singer had to first deliver the deliverer of the end of the world. Tom Hardy was rumoured initially, but the director soon found his man: Oscar Isaac. Here, Singer reasoned, was an actor who could hold his own with heavyweights like Lawrence and

Fassbender. Here was a man who could project a sense of steely, megalomaniacal menace while finding the humanity beneath all that blue paint. And, most crucially, here was someone willing to go "Full Skeletor".

"It's an expression we developed on set, coined from the movie *Masters Of The Universe*," laughs Singer, referring to the skeletal villain played by Frank Langella in that 1987 kids' cartoon adaptation starring Dolph Lundgren. (As chance would have it, Singer's good friend, Gary Goddard, who wrote and directed the movie, shows up on set that very day; he's tickled when he

TEAM X

KODI SMIT-MCPHEE is NIGHTCRAWLER

Talk to your average 19 year-old bloke, and chances are you'll tackle the following topics: sport (possibly football), music, the tweets of Kim Kardashian. Kodi Smit-McPhee is not your average 19 year-old bloke. "I study quantum physics and ancient Egyptian religion and ancient philosophy and Egyptian philosophy," he says, in an almost off-hand manner, before going on to outline the kind of bewilderingly big-brained theories that would have Beast reaching for the smelling salts. Deepak Chopra is name-dropped, as is the Egyptian god of wisdom, Thoth, and the philosopher Hermes Trismegistus. It's clear why Bryan Singer calls him 'The Prophet'.

It's also clear why the young Australian actor, who previously graced the likes of *The Road*, *Slow West* and *Let Me In*, is a perfect fit for this new version of Nightcrawler, the blue-skinned, teleporting mutant who shows up in an *X-Men* movie for the first time since 2003's *X-Men 2*, when he was played so memorably by Alan Cumming. Nightcrawler — or Kurt Wagner, as he's also known — is a sensitive, inquisitive soul. "Kurt's an affectionate, cute character," says Smit-McPhee. "He's almost a cute animal to me. He comes from a different direction to the other X-Men. He has a different backstory, a different look. He's awkward and weird and amazing in a different way."

It takes three hours every day to transform the gangly actor into Nightcrawler, but you won't find him complaining. "I find I'm extremely grateful to be that uncomfortable playing a character," he says. "It's like being enlightened."

Today, though, he's got a day off, and he's extremely grateful for that as well. "It's a very nice thing to get out of the shower and not see blue everywhere," he laughs, "like Nightcrawler's had an attack of diarrhoea or something." Ah, so it's not all highfalutin theories; there's a lowbrow side in there, too. Maybe he is a normal teenager, after all.



T E A M

X

ALEXANDRA SHIPP *is* STORM

When we first meet Alexandra Shipp's Storm in *X-Men: Apocalypse*, she will not be the cool, collected stateswoman played by Halle Berry across four previous X-movies. Here, she's a young orphan, using her wiles and weather witch abilities to survive on the streets of Cairo. In fact, Ororo Munroe isn't even an X-Man at first — she operates firmly on the other side of the law. So when Apocalypse shows up, offering her a chance to become the first of his Four Horsemen, she's in. "My take on Storm is coming from a completely emotional state," says Shipp, "when you're 18 and just settling into your hormones. When Apocalypse says, 'I am what you are looking for. You will be the goddess you deserve to be,' that clicks for her." A younger Storm allows the character to return to her roots as a Kenyan goddess (Berry's Storm started off with an accent in *X-Men*, before dropping it for the sequels). "The minute I got this, I started studying Kenyan everything," says Shipp. "I'm trying not to sound Jamaican! They have similar glottal sounds." And then there's the hair. Storm's mohawk, one of the most famous hairdos in comic book history, was first introduced by artist Paul Smith in 1983 — which just happens to be the year in which *Apocalypse* is set. So Shipp had to shave her noggin. "It's been a bit of a shock," she admits of life without her usual curls. "I wasn't sure what was under there. A dent, or three sixes." Shipp's life changed in the time it took Bryan Singer to tweet an update last January. "I looked at my phone," she says of Singer's post in which he confirmed that she was his new Storm. "I was like, 'What does this mean? Am I Storm?'" Twenty minutes later she got even-more-official-than-a-tweet-from-the-director-of-the-movie confirmation: she was, indeed, Storm. "I didn't know whether to crap my pants or throw up," she laughs. Which did she choose? "It was simultaneous." Lovely.



finds out.) "I mean that in the most flattering way to Mr. Frank Langella. It's not a joke: he committed. So that's become our vernacular for what levels of intensity these villains can take their performance to. Sometimes you want to go Half Skeletor. Sometimes Three-Quarter Skeletor. Occasionally I allow Oscar to go Full Skeletor."

Singer then shows *Empire* a scene that illustrates his point. It's a seduction scene, in the purest sense of the word, as *Apocalypse*, seeking to recruit Magneto as the crown jewel of his Horsemen, takes him to the scene of his biggest trauma and whispers sweet nothings

into his ears. "He comes to Erik when he's at a very low place, very vengeful," says Fassbender. "He's railing against God, he's demanding answers, and when *Apocalypse* shows up it's like, 'Have I been answered in some way?'"

It's an enormously powerful moment, with both Fassbender and Isaac raw, intense, committed. In Isaac's case it's particularly impressive, given that he's encumbered — and virtually unrecognisable, sadly, Poe Dameron fans — by heavy prosthetics and a heavier costume. "Had I known [the make-up involved], I would have probably said





Angel (Ben Hardy) psyches himself up in an East Berlin mutant fight club. **Below left:** Josh Helman's Stryker means business.



no,” jokes Isaac, who’s such a big X-Men fan that he actively sought out the role. “Hopefully it added to the intensity of the character emotionally.”

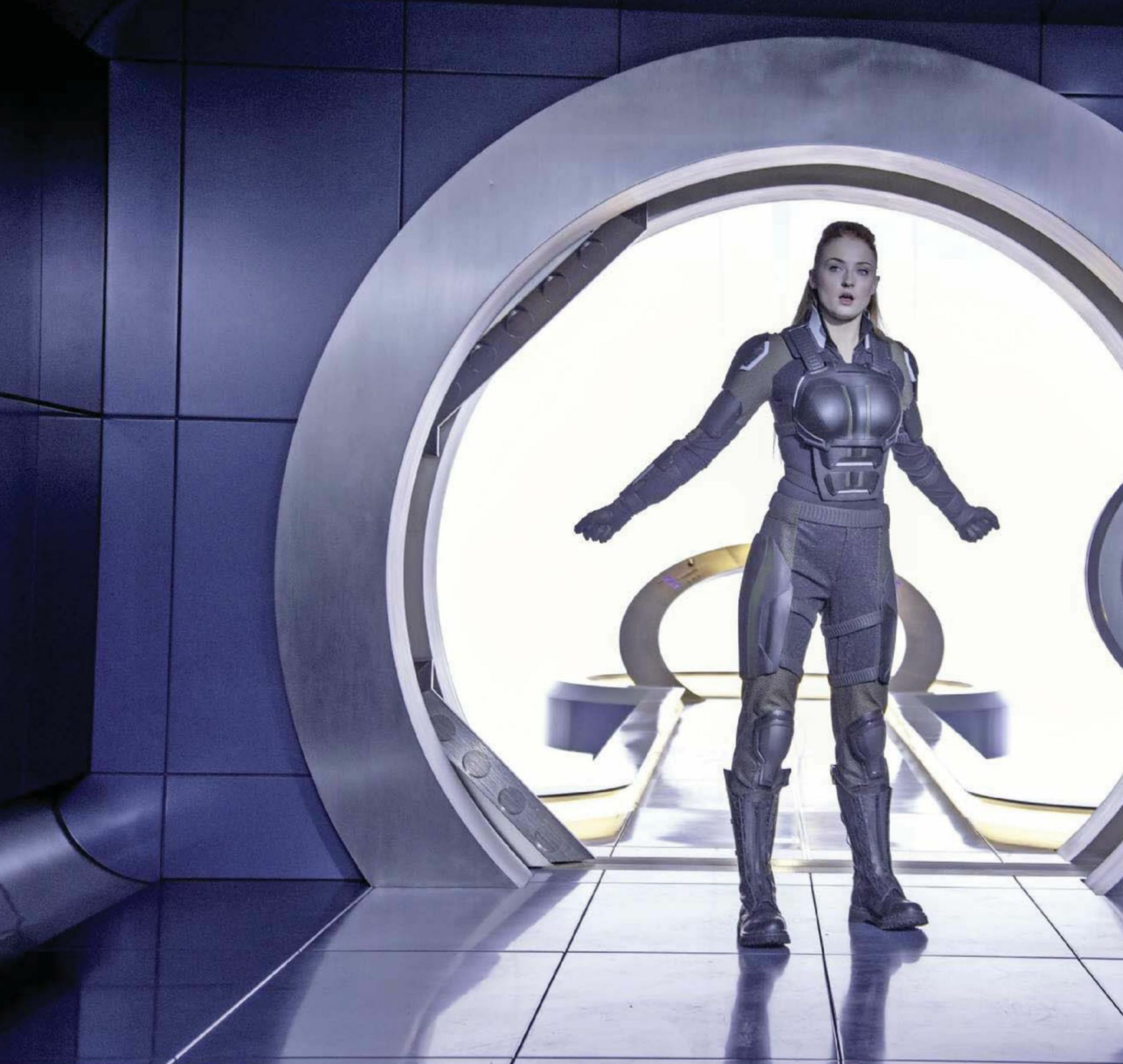
From the brief snippets we’re privy to, that does seem to be the case. But the Fassbender/Isaac act-off is also a stark reminder that, for all the devastation and destruction that’s about to be wrought, this is a franchise that started off all those years ago with a scene set in Auschwitz. The X-Men movies have weightier ambitions than most.

“We have large sequences,” says Singer, “and there are some movies where that’s the gag. That’s never going

to be our gag. We have big shit, but our movie is always going to be driven by our characters.”

That is evident throughout *Empire’s* three-day stint on the film’s Montreal set; all of which are dedicated to a sequence that takes place at Alkali Lake, the Canadian military base which played such a pivotal role for Hugh Jackman’s Wolverine in *X-Men 2* and, erm, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*.

There is no Wolverine here. “As a central character, he didn’t fit into this particular story,” says Singer. But Lawrence (not in Mystique blue), Nicholas Hoult (in full furry mode as >



Beast), Evan Peters (the super-speedy Quicksilver) and Rose Byrne (CIA analyst Moira MacTaggart) are present and correct.

It's a seemingly simple set-up: the quartet have been kidnapped by army twonk William Stryker (Josh Helman) following a cataclysmic event at the X-Mansion, and wake up in a holding cell. On a balcony above them, Stryker taunts his prisoners, demanding to know the whereabouts of Magneto. And that's essentially it.

But over the three days, Singer fiddles and finesses the material, giving everybody something to do. Hoult gets

a comedic bit with the locked doors. Byrne gets a big chunk of X-position. Lawrence, unfortunately, gets a crick in her neck from lying on the cold, steel floor, so she has to miss the second day of filming. "I'm turning 25 — all your bones start giving out," she laughs upon her return the next day. "On *The Hunger Games*, I've had to run through trees which were exploding and on fire, but I got injured sleeping on a grated floor? So weird."

Without his leading lady, Singer doesn't miss a beat, shooting around her, cutting a page of dialogue, and taking the opportunity to refine the scene further so that when Lawrence returns, he can



Quicksilver (Evan Peters) prepares to spirit Raven (Jennifer Lawrence) away from danger. Beware of whiplash.



The immensely powerful Jean Grey (Sophie Turner) stands outside Cerebro in the X-Mansion.

spend quality time developing a fairly lengthy exchange with Quicksilver.

By the end, the sequence is almost unrecognisable from those first few takes. It's longer, looser, funnier, and, as with the best moments, focused on character. That's Singer and Kinberg's goal. Even the action in their movie should spring organically from such considerations, including the show-stopping psychic battle between Apocalypse and Xavier, in which the former can grow to gargantuan proportions, while the latter can step out of his wheelchair, ready to dispense roundhouse kicks of X-justice. "I got to beat the shit out of Apocalypse

the other day," laughs McAvoy. "Charles gets pretty violent on his ass. And Apocalypse tries to do something to me that's pretty fucking brutal. I think that might leap out at people."

WHEN EMPIRE catches up with Singer for the final time in February, he's pretty beaten up himself. He's just finished filming the very last shot in a fortnight of additional shooting and pick-ups in Montreal. He's jetlagged, he's hurt his left shoulder, and he's exhausted but elated. "This movie to me is closure," he says. "It's, in a way, a conclusion to a six-film journey." ➤

TEAM

X

OLIVIA MUNN *is* PSYLOCKE

Warning: playing a sword-wielding telekinetic warrior can be hazardous to your health. "I've been banged up and put back together," says Olivia Munn, showing off arms stippled with red and black welts from fight training. "And I pulled both hamstrings," she says. "It's a weird thing to be in so much pain and yet be excited by it."

Munn's excitement stems from a place of pure, undiluted joy: the fulfilment of a childhood dream. As far back as she can remember, she's always wanted to be Psylocke. "I come from a family that would talk about *X-Men* as if it were the Civil War," she says. "Every week, we would go get the comic books. It was our childhood.

I've loved Psylocke for so long."

Munn's enthusiasm for the character spilled over in her first meeting with Singer, when she effectively schooled the director on his own movie. "It made me feel good to be able to speak for her," she says. "'Oh, you don't know her? Let me tell you about her...'" He could have thought it annoying, but he was like, "I hear you!" Munn's contributions led to the character's costume changing from a black leather number to the purple-and-red creation virtually torn from the pages of the comic book.

Although Psylocke is one of the Four Horsemen, Munn insists she isn't necessarily evil. "She's looking for a righteous purpose. Her powers can be used for good and bad, and right now it's bad. And it's fun to play bad."

Munn started out as a TV host on the popular G4 geek property *Attack Of The Show!* in 2006, and though she's been acting full-time for a while now — most notably in Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom* — this is her biggest project to date. "I still get nervous coming on set," she admits. "I feel like it wasn't long ago I was on G4, and I still feel like somebody dropped a wristband. 'I'm going in, guys, I'll tell you what I find!'"



TEAM

X

BEN HARDY is ARCHANGEL

The leap from Peter Beale on *EastEnders* to winged mutant was, as you'd expect, a formidable one for Ben Hardy.

"I was terrified," he says of his first day shooting *X-Men: Apocalypse*. "My girlfriend was over and she'll tell you, the night before I was not good to be around at all. There wasn't much sleep that night, and not in the good sense..." After the cameras had finally rolled on his first scene, the nerves didn't abate much. "I was part of the ensemble and didn't have any dialogue," he recalls. "Which meant I was nervous again the first time I had dialogue!"

As portrayed in the early editions of the *X-Men* series, Angel is a brash, outspoken playboy, the heir to a major corporation: not a million miles away from the son of Ian Beale, then. Although in this iteration, the character's a more tortured soul, forced to battle other mutants in an underground fight club. Rescued and recruited by *Apocalypse*, he's transformed into the metal-winged Archangel, the third corner of his Four Horsemen jigsaw. Something Hardy could get his teeth into. "He's been wronged a lot in his life," he explains. "He's angry about that and maybe quite cocky and arrogant, and he gets caught up in *Apocalypse*'s logic."

Hardy also got to experience something that almost never happens in Albert Square: flying. "It was great fun," he says of being whizzed around in a harness. "It's not comfortable, though. Particularly for the manhood."

Hardy played Peter Beale for three years, before quitting Albert Square to try his luck in Hollywood; a decision that was vindicated in just one week when he landed the role. "It's still sinking in," he says. "Not to discredit what I've done before, but this was the ultimate goal, to do films like this. I feel blessed. Please don't say blessed, I'm playing Angel. You're going to do it to me, aren't you?" Would we do something like that?



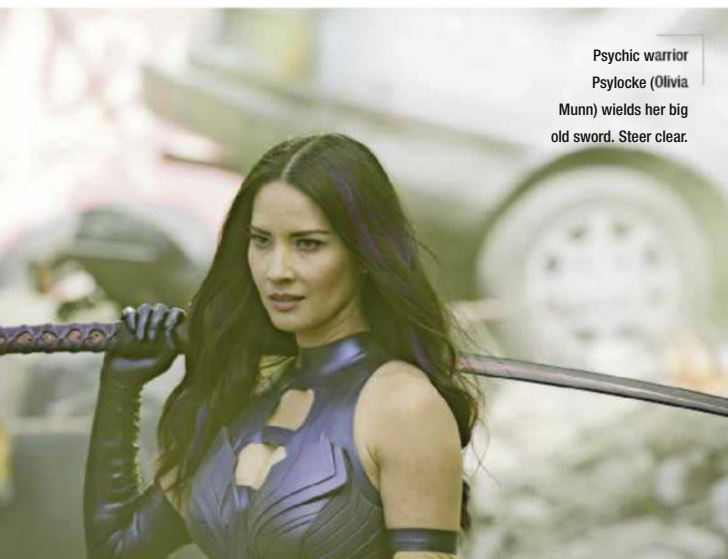
"Did you unplug the iron?" Jean Grey and Nightcrawler (Kodi Smit-McPhee) have a moment.



That journey, of course, began with *X-Men* back in 2000 (although Singer started work on the movie in 1996), with the casting of his first group of X-Men: James Marsden as Cyclops, Famke Janssen as Jean Grey, Halle Berry as Storm. For *Apocalypse*, he got to fill those roles all over again in the form of Tye Sheridan, Sophie Turner and Alexandra Shipp, while also adding Kodi Smit-McPhee as a young version of *X-Men 2*'s Nightcrawler. "This movie is the story of the true formation of the X-Men. Fundamentally, the story is about how Xavier came to form the X-Men as we would know them in

X-Men 1, 2 and 3," adds the director.

Singer is closing the loop while introducing plenty of possibilities for the next movie with the formation of an all-new, all-different X-Men. This is the director who had Cyclops sneer at the idea of "yellow spandex" in *X-Men*, but he's embracing the comic-book aesthetic more openly than ever before. "I'm doing it gradually," he confirms. "We're not *The Dark Knight*, we're not Marvel [Studios], we have our own style, and to let that evolve slowly has been part of the fun for me." It also means that, at last, McAvoy finally gets to go "full baldie" as Xavier, for reasons we couldn't possibly divulge.



Psychic warrior
Psylocke (Olivia
Munn) wields her big
old sword. Steer clear.

"I'm glad we did it," he says. "It feels now that I'm playing Professor X, whereas before I thought I was playing Charles."

The *X-Men* series will power on, of course. But when it starts up again, is there a chance Singer might not be on board? "Closure" is such a definitive word. "Abandoning the franchise is not something I think about," he says. "But I could not roll into another *X-Men* movie tomorrow. And I hope not to. I hope to take a break."

Empire's idea of a break is sitting on a beach, earning 20 per cent. Singer's is to make another huge movie. Later in the year, he starts shooting one of his

dream projects, an adaptation of Jules Verne's classic adventure tale, *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea*. "I'm in soft prep. Well, I'm in semi-hard prep," he giggles. "It's a very aggressive, very intense science-fiction movie that happens to take place in a strange and interesting time period."

Kinberg and his fellow X-producers, Hutch Parker and Lauren Shuler Donner, seem to be keeping the door ajar for Singer to return once he's hung up his wetsuit. Kinberg admits ideas have been kicked around, but no official announcement has been made, while the expanding X-universe, inspired by the >



Singer poses with his Professor X (McAvoy) and the new-look team.

phenomenal success of *Deadpool*, will keep them busy for a while. Hugh Jackman's final film as Wolverine starts shooting in May, and will be swiftly followed by Channing Tatum and Doug Liman's *Gambit*, a *New Mutants* movie following the adventures of younger recruits, and, naturally, *Deadpool 2*.

But should there be an *X-Men 7*, as nobody will ever call it, casting may also be an issue. Singer is introducing new cast members with one eye on the future, but this prequel trilogy has been built around Fassbender, Hoult, Lawrence, and McAvoy, whose contracts all expire with *Apocalypse*. They could

all wave goodbye at this point, but interestingly they appear keen not to. McAvoy talks casually about "the next one", while Lawrence, who can surely write her own ticket, is equally effusive. "I am dying to come back," she says. "I love these movies, I love being in them. I love ensemble movies because it's not on anyone's shoulders."

Who could the X-Men face next? Well, there's Magneto, of course. There's always Magneto. However, there's a sense that his villainous rinse-and-repeat may have played out.

To the comics, then, and ne'er-dowells like the geneticist Mister Sinister,

or Onslaught, a psionic melding of Xavier and Magneto. "I'd love to use Proteus somehow," says Singer of a mutant that can warp reality itself. "There's a lot visually you could do with a character like that."

Or there's even Jean Grey, who is famously consumed by the immense power rumbling around inside her and becomes Dark Phoenix, an entity capable of consuming a star. A version of that storyline played out in *X-Men: The Last Stand*, but both Singer (who passed on directing) and Kinberg, who co-wrote it, have lamented the sloppy execution. They want a second bite of the cherry,



and there may even be a hint here that Phoenix is ready to rise from the ashes. "Jean is a huge part of this movie," says Kinberg. "It's fun to write characters that you know one day will become maybe too powerful for their own good. It's fun to see sparks of that."

Still, no point worrying about apocalypse soon when the focus should be on *Apocalypse* now, as the oldest franchise in comic book movies goes seriously big. That's evolution and escalation. ■

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE IS OUT ON MAY 19 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

SUPER-MUTANT!

BLENDING X-MEN BODY PARTS TO CREATE THE ULTIMATE MEGA-FREAK

WORDS DAN JOLIN ILLUSTRATION JOHN ROYLE



1 STORM The 1983 mohawk-makeover look was easily the weather witch's coolest.

2 CYCLOPS Eyeballs that laser out deadly force-blasts? If looks could kill...

3 TOAD A tongue that stretches up to 13 feet? If licks could kill...

4 HAVOK Cyclops' big brother can do plasma blasts from his chest, making him the only mutant who can nuke you with his nipples.

5 COLOSSUS The metallic Russian strongman's burnished biceps should be kept well-oiled.

6 WOLVERINE Three razor-sharp, adamantium reasons why you should never fist-bump Logan.

7 BEAST No X-Men-based freakensteins should be without a splash of blue, so here's some navy fur, courtesy of Dr. Hank McCoy.

8 LADY DEATHSTRIKE Super-stabby fingers, as modelled by Kelly Hu in the first X-Men sequel.

9 NIGHTCRAWLER A devilish appendage from the BAMF-y Kurt Wagner, and fully prehensile, too.

10 ARCHANGEL Wings once nice and feathery, now turned to deadly sharp metal by Apocalypse.

11 SHADOWCAT A ghostly gam from Kitty Pryde, who can literally walk through walls.

12 EMMA FROST "A kiss on the hand may be quite continental / But diamond is a girl's best unbreakable material to transmute into..."



GAMES OF THRONES SPECIAL / PART I

You Know Nothing

The sixth season of *Game Of Thrones* takes us into uncharted territory: we're going beyond the books now...

WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN



There are a few unwritten rules when it comes to the denizens of Westeros.

Think twice before entering a place called the House Of The Undying. If you receive a wedding invite, politely RSVP with an, "I'd love to, but I just booked a holiday to Skagos in the Shivering Sea." And perhaps most crucial of all: never, ever, ever interrupt a Bolton.

Empire is sat across a table from not one but two of them. Namely Roose (Michael McElhatton), the treacherous snake who stabbed Robb Stark in the heart; plus his bastard son, icy-eyed sadist Ramsay (Iwan Rheon), who since his debut in *Game Of Thrones*' third season has trained dogs to rip innocent young girls to shreds, and chopped off a man's penis before sending it to his family. McElhatton and Rheon are, we're sure, perfectly nice blokes, but it's hard to dispel the feeling that one wrong question could result in a rigorous flaying.

And then, just as Rheon is getting into full flow about his character's sociopathic tendencies, the iPhone he's placed on the table starts to vibrate. Silence descends, as two Bolton heads swivel to regard the offending item with displeasure.

"It's Theon," deadpans McElhatton.

"REEK?" bellows Rheon, lifting the phone to his ear and pretending to take the call. "GET YOUR ARSE BACK TO WINTERFELL!" His feigned menace melts into a look of genuine worry. "Hope I didn't actually answer that..."

If *Game Of Thrones* is TV's biggest chessboard, loaded with dozens of characters plotting sophisticated attacks on each other, then the end of Season 5 saw a mass scattering of the pieces, as if a cat had leapt onto it, swatting wildly with its paws at kings, bishops and pawns alike. The cruel hand of fate (otherwise known as showrunners David Benioff and D. B. Weiss, in league with novelist George R. R. Martin) struck some we love, like Jon Snow (Kit Harington), who was stabbed by six members of his brotherhood, the Night's Watch; and

Daenerys (Emilia Clarke), whose slow but steady climb to power was scuppered by an assassination attempt, leaving her new advisor, Tyrion (Peter Dinklage), in the middle of the carnage, and landing her — via a dragon-ride — once again in the hands of the barbaric Dothraki. Which is something of a Khal-amity, as, assuming the show stays true to the books, these are the followers of the Khaleesi's prime rival, Khal Jhaqo.

Even the villainous Boltons have suffered a major setback. Sansa (Sophie Turner) and Theon (Alfie Allen), aka the hideously tortured 'Reek' — previous owner of the aforementioned lopped-off manhood — were last seen leaping from the walls of Winterfell, finally defying their captors. Roose and Ramsay, we can confirm, are pissed. "We've lost a woman who can bear a new heir and make an alliance between the Starks and the Boltons to Winterfell," says McElhatton. "It's a major error." Adds Rheon: "Sansa is a huge blow. As for Theon, that's less important, but Ramsay is gutted he's lost his little servant. He'll miss Theon. Or what's left of him."

Meanwhile, in King's Landing, the awful Cersei (Lena Headey) has been publicly humiliated and is facing trial, while prayer-chanting nut-nuts have taken over the capital. "I started out by basing my character on Pope Francis," says Jonathan Pryce, who plays the show's latest power-grabber, the High Sparrow. "A man of the people, who walks barefoot and administers to the poor. But he's really a religious zealot: homophobic, extremely right-wing, a man who dishes out punishments in a quite violent and aggressive way. You're going to see some more of that."

Pressed for more information, Pryce clams up. "I think the musical numbers are going to be a big surprise," he smiles. "I'll be doing some show tunes: the High Sparrow's greatest hits..."



Above: Maisie Williams' Arya Stark must learn to cope with blindness. Here: "Have you got my penis?" Alfie Allen's Theon with Sophie Turner's Sansa.



Gwendoline Christie returns as Brienne. Below: Isaac Hempstead-Wright's Bran is back, heading on *Inception*-like journeys with the Three-Eyed Raven (Max von Sydow).





Will Melisandre
(Carice van Houten)
revive Jon Snow?
Below: Emilia Clarke's
Daenerys faces
the Dothraki.

IF THE CAST ARE EVEN

more evasive about plot details now than they were in previous years, it's because this season *Game Of Thrones* will be, literally, off-the-books. Although the TV show has increasingly deviated from the details of George R. R. Martin's colossal volumes, it still loosely followed their arc. Now, in most of its plotlines, it is overtaking the last book published, 2011's *A Dance With Dragons*, and with the next one, *The Winds Of Winter*, still being written by Martin, we've crossed the proverbial Wall and are heading into wild, uncharted lands. If the warnings issued by the cast are anything to go by, here be things worse than dragons.

"It's a bit scary for the actors," says Peter Dinklage. "Everyone before this knew when they were going to perish. Sean Bean knew he was going to die in Season 1. Richard Madden knew he was going to die in Season 3. But now literally no-one knows. Dave and Dan hold our future in their hands."

In 2013, the two showrunners flew to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to visit Martin. There, the author removed his trademark Greek fisherman's cap, took a deep breath, and told them the ending of the saga. And in case you're wondering how epic it gets, the meeting took a *week*.

So Benioff and Weiss are two of the very few who know what lies at the end of the road. "We have some wild upcoming scenes based on inside information George gave us, and we have some other wild scenes that won't be in the books," they tell *Empire* via a joint email. "George is the sole master of the books, from which the series sprang, so his creative influence is everywhere. But he's in Santa Fe writing the books and we're in Belfast making the show. If we've joined the Night's Watch, he's stuck in the Citadel. He's built the damn place, and now they've gone and locked him in."

At the very least, this new era of uncertainty means even *Game Of Thrones* über-fans (Throneheads? Night's Watchers? Masochists?) can have some hope that, against the odds, the good guys — what's left of them — will make it through. As a favourite character of both the audience and Martin himself, Tyrion is one of the least likely to check out this season, though his position is perilous and he's certainly suffering. "He's the same old survivor but I don't think he finds the world as joyful as he did before," Dinklage tells *Empire*. "He has a lot of mistrust in his heart now, though he is trying to find





that joy again. I think that's really interesting to play. And working with my friend Conleth Hill, who plays Varys, is so much fun. We were back together at the end of Season 5 but I got to do a lot of good stuff with him [in Season 6]."

On the Stark side of things, while Sansa is now free from the abusive captivity she's suffered at the hands of monstrous suitors (Tyrion excepted) since her father's execution, her siblings, Arya and Bran, are undergoing very different types of training, each with a supernatural tinge. The former, being tutored in the art of assassination in Braavos' House Of Black And White, is being pushed to new lows while testing her own physical limits.

"There are some points this year that get really, really dark and sad for Arya," says Maisie Williams. "It was the first time reading the scripts where I was like, 'Oh, she's struggling.' But it's an incredible season. Despite having been blinded, Arya gets very physical and does a lot of stunts. I had a separate set of contact lenses with peep-holes in, so nobody got hurt, but there were a few close calls where I nearly

smacked some people in the head."

As for Bran, after not appearing at all in Season 5, he's back in a crucial story strand, one that's more than a little out-there. Having traversed the wilds and escaped a cadre of malevolent wights, he and Meera found themselves in what Isaac Hempstead-Wright describes as a "strange wizard cave place". We pick things up with the duo encountering the Three-Eyed Raven (Max von Sydow), otherwise known as Mr. Tree, an ancient, magical being, and the last 'greenseer'.

"He's a thousand year-old, wise sage," explains Hempstead-Wright, "who has become one with the roots of the weirwood tree. Those trees hold a special power of being connected with the past, present and future." Which explains how, this season, the ill-fated Ned Stark will, in a sense, return: 13 year-old actor Sebastian Croft has been cast as a younger version of the Sean Bean-portrayed character (a Bean-sprout, if you will) to appear in Bran-witnessed flashbacks.

"Bran and the Three-Eyed Raven both go on these shared visions into dream worlds — I like to frame it as *Inception*

— with the Three-Eyed Raven explaining to Bran exactly what is happening," Hempstead-Wright continues. "And some very exciting things are unleashed that haven't been in the books."

AS THE YOUNGER STARKS'

powers develop, their stepbrother lies on the ground at Castle Black, his life-blood seeping away. It's the biggest question going into Season 6: is this really the end for Jon Snow? Despite the fact that Kit Harington was spotted on set in September, luxurious locks intact, the stars are giving away nothing — if there is anything to be given away.

"He's dead... Everyone has to get used to it," Harington has insisted. Which has hardly quelled fans' tears and tantrums (seriously, go to YouTube and check out 'Jon Snow Death Reaction Compilation'). As for the show's overlords, Benioff and Weiss have taken a fiendish amount of enjoyment in teasing viewers, issuing a poster with the character's face covered in blood, and responding to *Empire's* attempt to ferret out intel with a riff on Harington's hair: "Have you ever

Clockwise from left: A post-penance Cersei (Lena Headey) sports a new shorter hairdo; King Tommen (Dean-Charles Chapman) and Jaime (Nikolaj Coster-Waldau) grieve for Nell Tiger Free's Myrcella; Varys (Conleth Hill) with Tyrion (Peter Dinklage), faced with soothing a city in turmoil.



Iwan Rheon as
the ultra-cold (not
least literally)
Ramsay Bolton.

seen it up close? It's so luxuriant and fragrant. Like a mink in heat... Sorry, what was the question?"

Number-one fan theory: he'll be resurrected by flame-haired sorceress Melisandre (Carice van Houten), who is conveniently located at the Wall. The actress bats this away with the speed of someone who's been asked about it 30 times since breakfast. "I'm afraid I'm gonna disappoint a lot of people," she shrugs, tucking into a banana in an un-sorceressy way. "But why so much pressure on my character? I mean, I understand that he's the good we want in this crazy world. And me and my mother and my sister want him to come back very desperately. But Melisandre has never brought anyone back to life. Why does it have to be me?"

Number-two fan theory: a new character, played by Ian McShane, will be the one to pull Snow from the ice. This is based on his provocative comment at a recent film festival: "I am responsible for bringing somebody back that you think you're never going to see again." Then again, he could be talking about The Hound (Rory McCann) or Catelyn Stark

(Michelle Fairley) or, hell, Theon's penis.

It's futile to guess what's coming (except winter — that's a cert). But there are two things you can safely assume. First, *Game Of Thrones* is getting bigger. This year saw around 250 shooting days, with 50 per cent more footage than was shot for Season 5. "Across many departments, the complexity has increased significantly: visual effects, prosthetics, make-up, horses, you name it," say Benioff/Weiss. Thousands of extras took part in scenes filmed in Girona, Spain. Even the dragons have doubled in size: the scaly buggers now measure 120 feet from wingtip to wingtip.

Second, *Game Of Thrones* is getting even more brutal — if that were possible. There are battles to be waged, unholy creatures to be faced, sins of the past to be avenged. And those fearsome, treacherous Boltons will be dealing out more than their fair share of the bloodletting. "Oh yes," confirms Rheon, grey eyes flashing. "There's always room for improvement." ■

GAME OF THRONES: SEASON 6 IS ON SKY ATLANTIC FROM APRIL 25.

HOW NOT TO LOSE YOUR HEAD

WITH SEASON 6 SET TO BE THE BLOODIEST YET, WE ASKED THE CAST FOR TIPS ON SURVIVING WESTEROS...



ALFIE ALLEN

(Theon Greyjoy)

"Keep your head down, and your cock hidden."



DEAN-CHARLES CHAPMAN

(Tommen Lannister)

"Don't be a Lannister. Or a Stark. Or a Snow."



JONATHAN PRYCE

(High Sparrow)

"Be nice to the writers. Plead with them to keep you alive for just one more season, so you can have a bit of money to retire."



MAISIE WILLIAMS

(Arya Stark)

"Don't be in it for power. That's bad news. So many characters have started with the best intentions and end up in trouble."



IWAN RHEON

(Ramsay Bolton)

"Be ruthless."



JOHN BRADLEY

(Samwell Tarly)

"Find some dragonglass."



LIAM CUNNINGHAM

(Davos Seaworth)

"Don't make eye contact with the producers. Don't go for dinner with them. Because anything can happen. You put a deposit down on a Ferrari then you're dead."



MICHAEL McELHATTON

(Roose Bolton)

"Being nice and good doesn't help. Power is might. If I'm more powerful than you, I'll take what you have. Nice guys finish last."



ISAAC HEMPSTEAD-WRIGHT

(Bran Stark)

"Getting in a cave and staying there is a pretty good survival method."

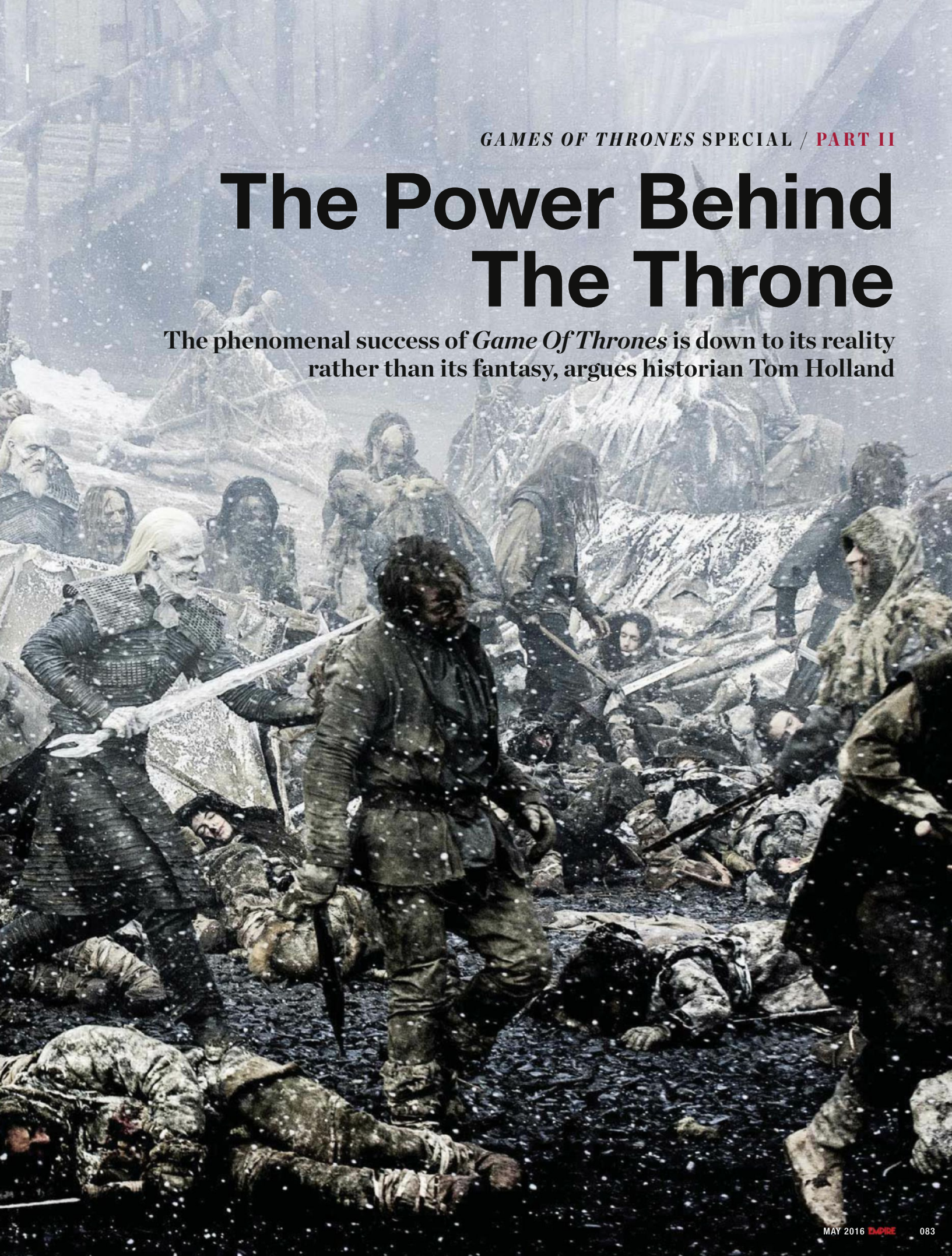


PETER DINKLAGE

(Tyrion Lannister)

"You've just got to keep Dave [Benioff] and Dan [Weiss] in their good graces. Wine and dine them, really."



A detailed, high-contrast photograph of a battle scene from the TV series Game of Thrones. The scene is set in a snowy, mountainous landscape. In the foreground, Jaime Lannister, with his characteristic white hair and wearing chainmail, is engaged in combat. He is holding a sword and looking towards the left. To his right, another soldier in dark, heavy clothing is also in the fight. The ground is covered in snow and the bodies of fallen soldiers. In the background, more soldiers and the rugged peaks of the mountains are visible under a grey, overcast sky. The overall atmosphere is one of intense, gritty warfare.

GAMES OF THRONES SPECIAL / PART II

The Power Behind The Throne

The phenomenal success of *Game Of Thrones* is down to its reality rather than its fantasy, argues historian Tom Holland

In Game Of Thrones, there is really only the one throne that matters.

It sits in the Red Keep of King's Landing, the mighty seat of royal power from which, in HBO's adaptation of George R. R. Martin's epic series of novels, kings have ruled Westeros for 300 years. Forged out of swords melted by dragon breath, it commemorates the feat of conquest that saw a single, continent-spanning realm fashioned out of seven previously discrete kingdoms. Throughout, it serves as a menacing stage-prop: a reminder of what is at stake. No-one can hope to be crowned as victor in the game of thrones until he — or she — sits on it unchallenged. "The swords of the vanquished, a thousand of them, melted together like so many candles": such is the Iron Throne.

Or is it? Although *Game Of Thrones* is recognisably fantasy, there are people in Westeros no less hard-headed and sceptical of myth than in our own world. Power does not belong only to those who wear crowns, and it is often those who lurk behind the Iron Throne who understand its workings best. In a seminal scene from Season 3 episode *The Climb*, two of these functionaries meet: Varys, the royal spymaster (Conleth Hill), and Petyr Baelish, the King's Master Of Coin (Aiden Gillen). Both are cynical and ruthless; both able to penetrate with a pathologist's eye the darkest recesses of human nature. The lessons they draw, though, are very different. When Varys, gazing at the Iron Throne, refers to the thousand swords from which it is said to have been made, Baelish scoffs that, in reality, there aren't even 200. "But what do we have left," Varys demands, "once we abandon the lie?" Swift and sure comes the answer: "Chaos."

Power-brokers in the Republican Party or the EU are doubtless having similar conversations right now. Naturally, the personal stakes in Westeros are considerably higher than in Washington or Brussels. Those who play and lose in its game of thrones risk losing their heads — or at a minimum, their genitals. Varys

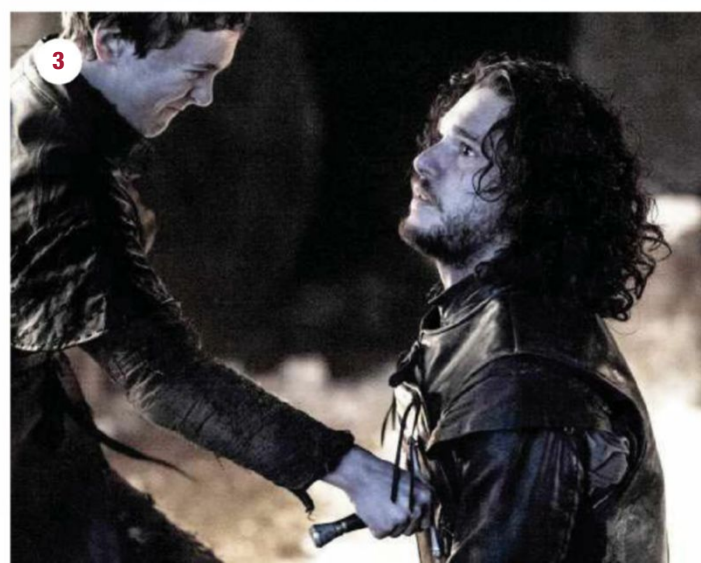
himself, castrated as a child by a sorcerer who then burnt his scrotum and penis as part of a ritual, has no illusions as to the horror which can engulf a society. Chaos, he declares, is a pit — and he has no wish to fall into it. Amoral though he appears, secretly he is working to save Westeros. *Game Of Thrones* would not have become the astonishing success it is without offering its viewers some genuine heroes. Codes of honour and displays of kindness are to be found even in the darkest places.

Repeatedly, though, they gutter, or else are snuffed out altogether. "Chaos isn't a pit," Baelish tells Varys. "Chaos is a ladder." Loyalty to the realm, or the gods, or love: all are illusions. "Only the ladder is real. The climb is all there is."

Baelish himself, as murderous as he is subtle, proves as adept as anyone at scaling it; but he is not alone in exploiting the implosion of Westeros into civil war. As it splinters, so the lineaments of the seven kingdoms absorbed into it start to show again; and so the ambitions of rival houses turn ever more carnivorous. The truth is — as *Game Of Thrones* has brutally demonstrated — that both Varys and Baelish are right. Chaos simultaneously engulfs and elevates. The deeper the pit, the more tempting the ladder.

THE CONSEQUENCE IS THE

prodigious spectacle of death and suffering for which *Game Of Thrones* has become notorious. Even as it has replaced *Harry Potter* as the surest source of employment for British character actors, so also do its blood-spattered plots necessitate a relentless culling of the cast. Stars who in any other series would have been able to book in for the long haul are liable to find themselves chewed up and spat out. The trick pulled by Hitchcock in *Psycho*, of dispatching a seemingly central protagonist less than half-way through the film, is one *Game*





1 Royal spymaster Varys (Conleth Hill) and King's Master Of Coin Petyr Baelish (Aiden Gillen) converse beside the Iron Throne in *The Climb*.
2 Catelyn Stark (Michelle Fairley) during Season 3's infamous Red Wedding.
3 Olly (Brenock O'Connor) betrays Jon Snow (Kit Harington) in the final scene of Season 5.



Of Thrones has repeatedly played on its viewers. Footage of people watching Season 3's Red Wedding, when a whole slew of characters were wiped out in a single sitting, rapidly went viral. Viewers gasped, cried out, clasped their hands to their mouths. Rare is the TV drama that can deliver such a shock.

Some of us, of course, had known full well what was coming. Because, for five seasons the TV series had been able to track the books that inspired it, giving readers a head start. Last season, though, that was starting to change. Assorted plot-lines began to go dramatically off-piste. Various hideous things happened that the novels had failed to flag up. And when, in the last scene of the series, Jon Snow was shown bleeding to death, Martin's readers were left as uncertain as anyone as to whether he was truly dead.

The Winds Of Winter, the next in the sequence of his novels, and which had originally been slated for publication before Christmas, remains unfinished; and as a result, as Martin himself has put it, "There will be certain plot twists and reveals in Season 6 of *Game Of Thrones* that have not yet happened in the books." The previews, making play with this, have been pointedly enigmatic. One shows the Hall Of Faces, an enormous vault deep in the bowels of a great stone temple, where the faces of the dead are kept — and although some belong to characters already slain over the course of the series, others do not. "They have no idea what's going to happen,"

a voice-over intones. For the first time, this is true of pretty much everyone.

The same, of course, could be said of the new season of any number of series, from *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* to *Downton Abbey*. Never before, though, has there been a show on the scale of *Game Of Thrones*. What befalls its protagonists reverberates across continents.

As in Martin's novels, so in the TV adaptations: the fascination of the series lies as much in the detail as in the plotting. Rarely does anything happen so extraordinary that it slips the moorings of a vividly evoked sense of place. An army of mouldering corpses storms a distant northern harbour in Season 5 episode *Hardhome*, and it is less the immaculately realised special effects that make it seem credible than the chill lapping of the ocean, the wisps of icy mist, and the portrayal of an entire way of life under siege. In Season 3's fourth episode, a dragon incinerates a slave-master with a single blast of breath, and his death, rather than seeming something conjured up from folktale, serves instead as the emblem of a social revolution.

Spanning as it does the extremes of ice and fire, the world of *Game Of Thrones* provides an immersiveness that is without precedent in TV fantasy. Zombies and dragons have no more starring a role in it than do its class structures, or its religious tensions, or its attitudes to the roles of men and women. Three-eyed ravens alternate with bankers; shape-shifters with smugglers. The appeal of the world in *Game Of Thrones* is not that it is fantastical, but that it is precisely the opposite: richly and brutally real.

ALL OF WHICH HELPS TO

explain why it is not just the greatest fantasy epic ever shown on TV, but the greatest historical epic as well. Westeros is recognisably bred of Europe's past. The series' backstory echoes the period which Shakespeare covered in his first series of history plays: the 15th century Wars Of The Roses, which saw the rival houses of Lancaster and York feuding over the English crown.

Head north, though, and the further from King's Landing the action moves, the further back in time it seems to take us. Banners flutter, donjons soar into the sky, and knights-errant undertake quests across landscapes that seem conjured from the heyday of the Middle Ages. Further north yet, an offshore kingdom armed with longships echoes Viking Scandinavia, while Winterfell, the stronghold in which the series opens, has

more than a touch of the Anglo-Saxon. At its very northernmost limit, the kingdom ruled from King's Landing is guarded by a massive rampart of ice: a defensive line that Martin has readily acknowledged was inspired by a visit to Hadrian's Wall. As in the Roman Empire, though, so in Westeros; the world does not end at the frontier of civilisation. Continue north, and the journey back into prehistory is precipitous. The snowy landscape beyond the Wall, complete with shamans and woolly mammoths, is recognisably that of the Ice Age. The nightmares bred there too, and which cast their shadow over the very first sequence in *Game Of Thrones*, seem conjured from a primordial darkness. If winter is coming, then it comes from the fabulously distant past.

"Fear is for the long night, when the sun hides for years and children are born and live and die all in darkness." So an old woman, the nurse of a son of the lord of Winterfell, tells her charge early in the first season. "That is the time for fear, my little lord, when the white walkers move through the woods."

That the long night may now at last be at hand, and the white walkers with it, does not diminish the potency of *Game Of Thrones* as a historical drama. Just the opposite. Dread of apocalypse, be it in the form of a wolf devouring the sun or a war in the heavens, haunted the imaginings of our ancestors. Ominous wonders were as assiduously tracked as the course of the harvests. Dragons in the skies were believed to portend the deaths of princes. As in Westeros, so in medieval Europe: the peril that was believed to lurk in the dimension of the supernatural could seem no less real than plague, or famine, or war.

The Iron Throne remains at the start of Season 6 in the Red Keep: the ultimate prize for all those who believe chaos is a ladder. Simultaneously, as the show's most fearsome sorceress, Melisandre, has warned, "The true war lies to the north." The power-struggle among mortal kings is nothing. "Death marches on the Wall." It is as though, in a drama about 1066, Harold were not fated to lose at Hastings, and demons were gearing up to cross the North Sea. The big problem with historical dramas is that we tend to know what happens. The genius of *Game Of Thrones* is to let us experience what it is like, when looking to the medieval past, not to know who wins. ■

TOM HOLLAND IS THE AUTHOR OF NUMEROUS BOOKS ON ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL HISTORY. HIS LATEST IS *DYNASTY: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE HOUSE OF CAESAR*.



Tom Got A Gun

She was the imperious golden age star. He was the unflappable hot-shot director. Together they resolved to make a groundbreaking Western. That film was *Johnny Guitar* — an “atrocious” that became an accidental classic

WORDS HELEN O'HARA



BY 1954, NICHOLAS RAY WAS hardly an inexperienced filmmaker.

Over seven years at big studio RKO, the director had already drawn impressive performances out of Humphrey Bogart in *In A Lonely Place* and Robert Mitchum in *The Lusty Men*. But his latest project, with one of Hollywood's biggest names and a Western to boot, was proving his toughest challenge yet. It was not uncommon, he'd later admit, for him to pull over his car during his morning drive to the shoot, and vomit into the gutter. "The atrocity" was what he called this latest project — for which "nausea was my reward".

His star, meanwhile, barely appreciated the experience any more than he. Joan Crawford had been an A-list fixture since 1928's *Our Dancing Daughters* and had won a Best Actress Oscar for 1945 noir-masterpiece *Mildred Pierce*. Though a silver-screen veteran, she'd never tackled a lead role in a Western before... and never would again. "I should have had my head examined," Crawford would later sniff. "No excuse for a picture being that bad, or me making it."

That picture was *Johnny Guitar*, and its two divergent but potent creative forces shouldn't have been so quick to disown it. Fifty-one years later, it would be celebrated by Martin Scorsese, no less, as "one of cinema's great operatic works. [It's] convulsive and passionate. There's really no other film quite like it".

IN 1953, JOAN CRAWFORD HAD just finished MGM's *Torch Song*, the last of her contracted studio pictures, and

was looking for something new. Her agent brought her an unpublished book by Roy Chanslor, another of his clients. Titled *Johnny Guitar*, it was the story of Vienna, a female saloon owner who calls in the titular gunslinger to protect her business against hostile locals, led by a cattle baron named Emma Smalls.

Crawford immediately related to the tough, principled Vienna, and the character so appealed to her she snapped up the movie rights. The Western was still Hollywood's most popular genre, and she'd not attempted it since a stardom turn in 1928's *The Law Of The Range*. She'd also been looking for an excuse to work with Nicholas Ray, whom she'd met while working with his then-wife, Gloria Grahame, on *Sudden Fear* the year before, so when she sold *Johnny Guitar* to Republic Pictures — an independent studio which specialised in Westerns — she did so on condition that she star, and Ray direct.

Republic was delighted. Crawford may by now have been in her late forties (then considered old for an actress), and was not associated with its favourite genre, but with her 1953 Oscar nomination for *Sudden Fear*, she was undeniably



Above: 1954 film poster artwork.

Right: Joan Crawford as Vienna, the strong-willed female saloon owner, alongside Sterling Hayden as Johnny 'Guitar' Logan.

enjoying a second spring. Ray, meanwhile, had already built a strong reputation for his work at RKO. And, for his part, he saw in Chanslor's story the opportunity to make a movie with a message, to experiment with colour (which he'd only worked in once before, for 1951 John Wayne picture *Flying Leathernecks*) and to work with a bigger star than a newly independent director could usually secure. Yet he couldn't have foreseen what was to come.

The shoot was based on the Republic studios lot, with location work happening near Coffee Pot Rock, in Arizona. Here, the weather hovered around zero each winter morning, and one scene required Crawford, along with co-star Sterling Hayden, cast in the title role, to swim in a freezing river during a key escape scene. But it wasn't the weather conditions which would make the production such a trial so much as the personalities.

"I should have known all hell was about to break loose," Ray later said. "As a human being, Miss Crawford was a very great actress." A product of the studio system, Crawford prided herself on her professionalism and her charm to the crew, but that did not



prevent her from making demands on her director that would ensure her primacy in the film.

She had become needled by her co-star, Mercedes McCambridge, who'd taken the role of the trouble-stirring villain of the piece, Emma Small. McCambridge, Crawford claimed, taunted her over her recent marriage to Fletcher Markle, a former boyfriend of Crawford's. In Donald Spoto's *Possessed: The Life Of Joan Crawford*, Crawford says, "We had in the cast an excellent actress but a rabble-rouser. She was perfectly cast as such in the picture, but she played her part offstage as well. The picture became a nightmare."

At first, Ray was content for the feud to build. "It really heightened the dramatic tension," he said, in Larry Quirk's *Joan Crawford: The Essential Biography*. "The hatred just radiated off the screen." However, the cast split between the two actresses, with Crawford's leading man, Hayden, firmly pro-McCambridge after Crawford asked that his disapproving wife leave the set during their love scenes. Hayden said afterwards, "There is not enough money in Hollywood to lure me into making another picture

Top right: Alternative *Johnny Guitar* film poster. **Above right:** Bar flies: Turkey Ralston (Ben Cooper), Vienna (Crawford) and Dancin' Kid (Scott Brady).

with Joan Crawford. And I like money."

The director soon realised he needed to rein it in. "I became afraid that all that anger would spill over and put an end to the picture," he said. "No 'heightened reality' is worth that." At one point, following an alcohol-fuelled row between the two actresses, Crawford broke into McCambridge's room, took her clothes and scattered them across the highway. Then, after watching McCambridge's big speech, riling up a posse against Vienna, Crawford went into a cold rage and told Ray she would quit unless he beefed up her role.

He did so, along with screenwriter Philip Yordan, writing a poignant romantic backstory for Johnny and Vienna and giving her some of Johnny's lines. "They basically made the Vienna character much tougher and more masculine, and gave her more to do," says Geoff Andrew, author of *The Films Of Nicholas Ray* and senior programmer at the BFI.

By the time they were done, Crawford had not only ensured that McCambridge would never upstage her, but also reduced Sterling Hayden's title character to a supporting role. While

Ray tended to be more interested in intangibles than the directors Crawford was used to, he clearly understood his leading lady. "He was very good with actors," says Andrew. "Obviously Crawford's a star. But the film plays on her humble origins. She was seen as someone who knew a lot about pain and suffering, but was fighting against the odds. That's true of Vienna."

THOSE CHANGES MADE THE FILM stranger — and stronger. With its shoot-outs and lynchings, *Johnny Guitar* may have a straightforward Western plot, but it was unusual to have women in both lead roles. Then there's Ray's touch. He admitted it was "rather baroque", larger than life in its cynical, noirish dialogue and glorious use of colour. One scene sees Crawford, dressed in pure white, playing piano against raw, red rock like some Wagnerian goddess. Ray filled the screen with "light and heat", too, with flaming torches and a spectacular blaze revealing the fierce emotions beneath Vienna's controlled exterior, while the director's sympathy for the outsider shines through in the film's unconventional heroes. ➤

Unsurprisingly, then, though the film was a solid financial success, making \$2.5 million at the US box office, the reviews were brutal. "Let's put it down as a fiasco," said *The New York Times*, while the *Daily Herald* loudly decried it as "IMMORAL!" Such hostility was, in part, driven by the film's echo of the Communist witch hunts which were then underway. "Vienna mirrored reality," said Ray. "Under fire from McCarthy, she refused to inform." Ray was a great sympathiser with McCarthy's victims, narrowly escaping calls to testify himself on more than one occasion, and Yordan had acted as front man for his blacklisted peers (this film, however, was his own work). Hayden *had* testified, and regretted it, while Yordan and Ray wittily cast a McCarthy supporter, Ward Bond, as a contemptible figure at the heart of Emma's posse.

The film's sexual politics, meanwhile, are not only ahead of their time, but arguably of our own — which also drew critical scorn. Consequently, *The New York Herald-Tribune* review opened with the statement, "Feminism has gone too far," while *The New Yorker* said, "It has not only male but female gunfighters... I can state authoritatively that this twist is doomed." Some 60 years later, though, the same publication called it a "proto-feminist masterwork" — far closer to the mark.

Vienna is the most authoritative figure on screen, able to end hostilities with a bullet to the head or an offer of breakfast. She literally wears the trousers and makes an explicitly feminist statement: "A man can lie, steal, and even kill. But as long as he hangs on to his pride, he's still a man. All a woman has to do is slip, once, and she's a 'tramp'! Must be a great comfort to you to be a man." Emma, who Ray described as the screen equivalent of "sulphuric acid", displays an obsession with Vienna that led some to speculate about a lesbian subtext. Roger Ebert noted, "All of the sexual energy is between the two women no matter what they say about the men." We're a long way from *High Noon*.

Overseas, shorn of the strict expectations of what a Western should be, *Johnny Guitar* eventually found fans. "Johnny Guitar is a phony Western, but not an 'intellectual' one," wrote François Truffaut in 1975. "It is... a fairy tale, a hallucinatory Western... *Johnny Guitar* is the *Beauty And The Beast* of Westerns."

Truffaut lauded the film as a genre-bending, ahead-of-its-time exercise in style, and filmmakers since have followed his lead — as has the US National Film Registry, which in 2008 preserved it for



Top: Director Nicholas Ray on set with Joan Crawford.
Above: Lynch mob: Vienna (Crawford) is shown the noose by her nemesis Emma Small (Mercedes McCambridge) and gang.

its cultural significance. Dario Argento and Bernardo Bertolucci studied it when working on *Once Upon A Time In The West* for Sergio Leone, and the two films certainly share elements: like the lonely saloon, and the plot to steal land from a woman at the coming of the railroad. Pedro Almodóvar used it in *Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown*, with Carmen Maura's character dubbing the famously bitter love scene between Joan Crawford and Sterling Hayden. There was even an off-Broadway musical adaptation in 2004.

Yet, despite the successful outcome of all that on-set tension, Ray struggled to shake the feeling he'd surrendered too much control to his demanding star, while Crawford never got over the hostile reviews. Still, they both softened over time. Ray later conceded that Crawford was "very attractive, with a basic decency". And Crawford remained an admirer of his. "Nicholas Ray was the only one who could have gotten me through *Johnny Guitar*," she said. And he inadvertently advanced gender politics in filmmaking. Even if it did make him physically sick. ■

JOHNNY GUITAR IS OUT ON LIMITED RE-RELEASE ON MAY 6.

LESSER-KNOWN JOAN

FOUR FURTHER CRAWFORDS WHICH DESERVE MORE ATTENTION



OUR DANCING DAUGHTERS (1928)

Crawford's breakthrough role saw her play an outwardly outrageous flapper with a secretly demure heart. Her true love marries her apparently saintly best friend, but soon discovers his new wife has a genuinely scandalous side while Crawford is true of heart. The film was shocking on the surface but secretly soppy, testing the Hays Code but delighting audiences.

THE GORGEOUS HUSSY (1936)

Crawford plays early women's rights advocate Margaret O'Neill in this historical biopic, opposite Lionel Barrymore as President Andrew Jackson and with male admirers including Melvyn Douglas, Robert Taylor and Franchot Tone (Crawford's soon-to-be husband).

It's no *Lincoln*, but O'Neill is a fascinating figure even in this sexed-up version of her story.

SUSAN AND GOD (1940)

From a script by Anita 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes' Loos, this is a fun blend of religious silliness and relationship drama, as Crawford's shallow society matron finds God, to the consternation of her peers and the delight of her neglected daughter. A failure at the box office, despite good reviews at the time.

SUDDEN FEAR (1952)

Crawford won her final Oscar nomination for this thriller, about a rich Broadway playwright (Crawford) who marries a young actor (Jack Palance) only to learn he plans to murder her for her money and run off with his girlfriend, the cad. She tries to turn the tables — but all does not go quite to plan. It's melodramatic, but well played and genuinely tense.

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The MAN WHO WOULD BE KING

Within just two years, the previously unknown **Taron Egerton** has proved he not only has star power, but also range. The kind of range that makes him perfect casting for... *Eddie The Eagle*?!

AN *Empire* PRODUCTION

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT PORTRAITS SARAH DUNN TYPE BEATO



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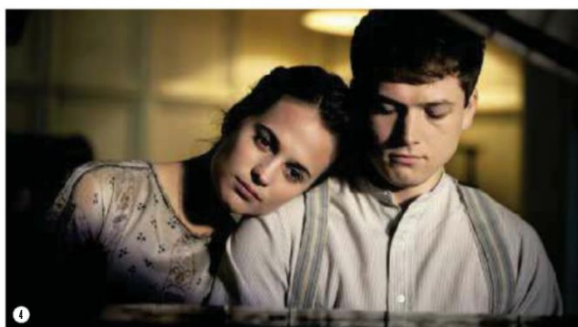
EVERYBODY REMEMBERS THEIR first time. And Taron Egerton is no different. It was October 8, 2013, when he first walked onto the set of Matthew Vaughn's *Kingsman: The Secret Service*. It was memorable for a few reasons. He wasn't just popping his cherry as a leading man on the big-budget spy caper — right there on the call sheet alongside venerable acting types like Michael Caine, Samuel L. Jackson and Colin Firth; this was his first time on a film set doing *anything*. Oh, and Vaughn was also planning to drop him from a 60-foot-high crane.

"It was the final part of the descent from a sky-dive," laughs Egerton. Well, he can laugh about it now. "I don't quite know how I got through that, really. It was a baptism of fire, but Matthew didn't have any doubts."

When Vaughn was looking for someone to play Eggsy, *Kingsman's* walking-ASBO-turned-gentleman-spy, he boiled it down to a straight choice between two young British actors: John Boyega and Egerton. Post-*Attack The Block*, Boyega was a known quantity; Egerton less so. At that point in his career, he had made something of a splash on the London theatre scene in the likes of *No Quarter* at the Royal Court and *The Last Of The Haussmans* at the National Theatre, but film hadn't come his way. Vaughn faced a dilemma. "It was a tough call — Boyega is a fabulous actor, but there's something about Taron," the director says. "You have to listen to your instincts about who that role is. John's probably thinking, 'Thank fuck he didn't cast me!' because he might never have been in *Star Wars*!"

A surprise smash, grossing \$414 million worldwide, *Kingsman* may have had its big-name stars, but it's hard to overestimate the importance of Egerton. Looking good in both Savile Row suits and shellsuits that seared your eyes, Egerton held his own alongside his illustrious co-stars.

Vaughn — who previously discovered Charlie Cox, Chloë Grace Moretz and Aaron Taylor-Johnson — had done it again. He'd found a kid who could not only handle the physical demands of action, but also transform himself completely and convincingly. So, when he was looking for someone to play the title role in *Eddie The Eagle*, for which he's producer, he knew just the guy.



1 As Eddie Edwards, with invented mentor Bronson Peary (Hugh Jackman).

2 *Kingsman: The Secret Service's* Eggsy keeps afloat.

3 Alongside Tom Hardy in *Legend*.

4 With Alicia Vikander in Vera Brittain memoir *Testament Of Youth*.

ON THE SURFACE,

playing the most (in)famous ski jumper in Olympic history might seem an unlikely next move for Egerton. It's a smaller film, for one. And Eddie Edwards, the icon of the 1988 Winter Olympics with his inch-thick specs, wispy 'tache and shock of ginger hair, is as far removed from Eggsy as they come. But that's the point. "I've been offered quite a few rude boys of late," he says, in a Welsh accent forged in that village with the long, unpronounceable name. "And there's a real relish in messing with people's expectations. 'Oh, you think I'm *this*, do you? Well, I'm actually *this*.' Eddie was a great way of doing that. It's a nice opportunity to do something that's very un-Eggy. Eddie's altogether more delicate. He's a bit more of an innocent."

Dexter Fletcher's film is frothy fun, the sort of unashamed crowdpleaser that should perform well but won't win major awards. Yet it confirms that Egerton is the real deal. Here, the only muscles he exercises are acting ones, bringing real charm to the hapless Edwards. And again he goes toe-to-toe with an experienced star (Hugh Jackman) and emerges with the film tucked under his arm.

Fletcher admits he was initially hesitant to cast Egerton. "I thought Taron was way too good-looking to play Eddie," he says. So producer Matthew Vaughn, supremely confident he had the right man for the job, flew the actor to New York for a screen test with Jackman that finally convinced the director. "He put his jaw ever so slightly forward and had these glasses that magnified his eyes and it was like, 'Wow, there he is.' He's not just a fast-car-driving, martini-drinking, women-bedding hero. He has more range than that."

Egerton says that he didn't take the role purely because of Vaughn, but there's no doubt he thinks fondly of his *Kingsman* director, not least because he changed his life. "I'd very much describe him as a friend," he says. "We speak on the phone about things that are totally unrelated to work. He asks for my opinion on things. For a young actor who can count the films he's done on one hand, it's a real privilege."

EVERYBODY REMEMBERS THEIR

first time. Eight years prior to his film-set debut, Taron Egerton found himself on stage in Aberystwyth, wearing a red dress and matching feather boa — his true introduction to acting.


"I had made a great group of friends, who are still my great group of friends now," he explains. "Some of them were involved in a youth theatre and I tagged along with them."

Tagging along led to a role in their production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Egerton was invited to play Flute, a bellows-mender who cross-dresses in the play within the play. "I remember being so, so nervous and apprehensive about being a slightly overweight, self-conscious 15-year-old putting on >



• PREVIOUS PAGE: GREY SUIT, SHIRT AND TIE BY HARDY AMIES AT MR PORTER.
• THIS PAGE: NAVY COAT BY CHESTER BARRE. GREY ROLL NECK BY TOMAS MAIER AT MR PORTER.





Taron Egerton,
photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
in Soho, London, on
February 11, 2016.

• THIS PAGE: BLUE SUIT AND BLUE SHIRT BY CHESTER BARRIE.
STYLING: GRACE GILFEATHER. GROOMING: NATHALIE ELEN. HAIR: JOE MILLS.
LOCATION: JJ LOCATIONS.

this dress and going out in front of a live audience,” recalls Egerton. “When it actually happened, and the audience cracked up, it was just the most amazing feeling I’ve ever had in my life.”

An amateur psychologist might say Egerton has been chasing that feeling since. It fuelled his desire to apply to drama school (after an initial rejection, he got into RADA), and that initial flurry of stage work. “To be honest, that’s something I really miss. I had dreams of winning Olivier Awards,” he admits. Film, he says, is something he thought might come along later.

Now he has over 170,000 followers on Twitter, always a decent measure of star power. A video of Mark Ruffalo’s wife doubling back to shake his hand at the BAFTAs (where he lost out on the EE Rising Star award to... John Boyega) went viral. And on the final occasion we speak to him for this piece, he has to negotiate a crowd of autograph hunters who have gathered outside his hotel. “That takes some getting used to,” he admits. “We’re not talking about the queue for the new Apple product or the new Harry Potter book, but it is very surreal.”

It would be easy for anyone in Egerton’s position to get carried away and turn into a raging asshole, but he has level heads to call upon for advice (“Hugh handles it really brilliantly,” he says of his *Eddie* co-star), and is determined to remain the same affable Welshman he was when he set foot on *Kingsman*’s set on that October day. After all, as they say, you can take the boy out of Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlantysiliogogoch, but you can’t take Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlantysiliogogoch out of the boy.

“I don’t know that anyone plans for this,” he says. “But I’d be very sorry to see it go because I am enjoying it immensely.”

NOBODY REMEMBERS THEIR

third time. But Egerton is adamant that will change with *Kingsman* sequel *The Golden Circle*: his third collaboration with Matthew Vaughn. “I’ve never been given a script before where it was written for me,” he says. “That’s an amazing feeling. It’s exciting to be back.” He’s currently in training for the movie, which starts shooting in April, and while he won’t elaborate on what’s in store for Eggsy, he will say, “It’s demented. Stomach-sickeningly demented at times.”

After that comes the title role in *Robin Hood: Origins*, the latest take on Sherwood Forest’s most famous denizen, which Egerton insists “feels like a very new retelling of that story, and very character-led. It’s set in Robin Hood-y times, but it will have a contemporary feel to it, a bit rock ‘n’ roll.”

It’s been a sharp ascent since *Kingsman*, which was only released just over a year ago. As well as bagging the role of England’s merriest outlaw, he’s also been linked with several blockbusters. Some of that speculation has been nonsense (like every white actor of a certain age, he’s been linked with the Young Han Solo movie), some of it specious (a link with playing Cyclops in *X-Men: Apocalypse*), and some of it spot-on (he screen-tested for *Pirates Of The Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales*). But they all have a common link: he’s not interested.

Egerton tells us that Vaughn sees more of Eddie Edwards in him than Eggsy, laughing that he’s not sure how to take that, but when he discusses his career game plan, we can see what Vaughn means. He’s ambitious, but not in a predictable way. “I want to play real characters, rather than young leads in very plotty things,” he says. “I want variety. I’m hesitant about strapping myself to another massive beast, unless I really want to do it. I’m not interested in being Franchise Boy.” ■

EDDIE THE EAGLE IS OUT ON APRIL 1 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 57.



**With punks-versus-Nazis siege thriller
Saulnier is on a mission: to resensitise**



***Green Room*, punchy director Jeremy
us to on-screen violence**

WORDS PHIL DE SEMLYEN

O

ne winter's evening at his west Oxfordshire home, Patrick Stewart settled in to read a new script he'd been sent. A young American writer/director had pitched him a role in his third feature, and he was flicking through the early pages. He'd be the big bad, a neo-Nazi called Darcy who has a cocky young punk band

cornered in a remote Oregon venue after they've stumbled on a fresh corpse. One abortive negotiation later and, positioned outside their dressing room, he has a band member's arm trapped in the door, horribly exposed to the blades of his skinhead troops. What he read next made him put the script down and hurry out of the room. "I walked around my property turning all the perimeter lights on and checking all the doors and windows," Stewart recalls. "When I'd surrounded my house in lights, I poured myself a big whisky and picked it up again."

Jeremy Saulnier's *Green Room* had its villain. Professor Xavier, Jean-Luc Picard, knight of the Realm and now Southern Electric's most valued customer, Stewart was sold. Terrified, but sold. And he hadn't even got to the bit with the pitbull.

"THERE ARE CERTAINLY A FEW

[moments] where we get the whole theatre gasping," laughs Saulnier. His film, rated 18 in the UK for "strong bloody violence and gore", boasts the most inventive, fun and often downright gut-churning violence of the year to date. One particularly grisly shot — destined to join *Drive*'s head stomp, *Kill List*'s hammer attack and *Irreversible*'s fire extinguisher battery in any Great Movie Deaths list worth its saltpetre — has had film critics not so much gasping as yelping like frightened lambs. Without giving too much away, it matches *Gone Girl* and Season 4 of *Breaking Bad* for box-cutter uses you really wouldn't want to try at home. Even its creator struggled with repeat viewings. "Editing that sequence made us sick to our stomachs," shudders Saulnier. "There's always a few super-savvy genre die-hards who love that shit, but in context it takes your breath away."

It's that context that gives *Green Room*, like the director's previous film, sparse revenge thriller *Blue Ruin*, real

edge. With audiences conditioned by HBO shows and Quentin Tarantino, Saulnier knows that shocks are harder to conjure these days. His solution is to put relatable characters into extreme situations and coolly chart the nastiness that ensues. In 2013's *Blue Ruin*, it was a lost soul haplessly trying to avenge his murdered parents; here it's a young punk band who've taken an impromptu gig in the wilds of Oregon only to find an audience composed of neo-Nazi footsoldiers.

"You can slaughter as many people as you can fit into the runtime," Saulnier tells *Empire*, "but unless you care about the characters, the impact of the violence will be diminished." That band, The Ain't Rights — comprising bassist Pat (Anton Yelchin), drummer Reece (Joe Cole), guitarist Sam (Alia Shawkat) and singer

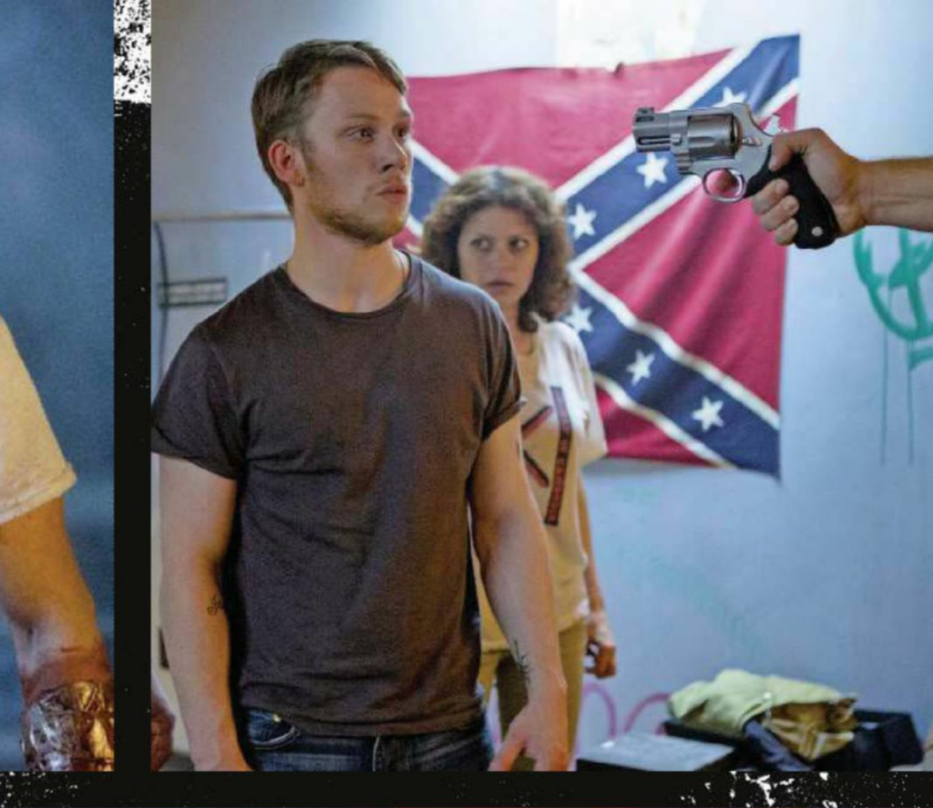
Tiger (Callum Turner) — are a spiky bunch when we meet them, but as their bravado fails them, Saulnier deftly shifts our sympathies. "I'll Method it out," he explains of his writing process. "I put myself in the shoes of the characters, so I'll be terrified and I'll do what I would do [in that situation]."

It shouldn't have been too hard for him to imagine. In his time, Saulnier has been a skater, an aspiring B-boy and "lead screamer" in a Virginia-based punk outfit of his own. The band was called No Turn On Fred, a reference to the local tradition of vandalising traffic signs by adding a spray-painted 'F'.

Now, with his sensible haircut and plaid shirt, you'd have trouble picking him from a crowd of young Brooklyn professionals. But when he talks punk



Top left: Amber (Imogen Poots) and Pat (Anton Yelchin) sense this might be a bit of a dive. Top right: Reece (Joe Cole) and Sam (Alia Shawkat) in the green room. Note the ominous flag. Above left: Gabe (Macon Blair) and Darcy (Patrick Stewart) at the gig. Above right: Callum Turner's Tiger performs *Nazi Punks Fuck Off*. Awkward.



rock, the early roots of *Green Room* reveal themselves. Like *The Ain't Rights*, he's experienced the feral crush of the mosh pit first hand. There were neo-Nazis at his gigs, too. He once found himself pummeled by a stranger in a Washington, D. C. mosh pit. "He picked me out and went insane on me, just flailing his really powerful fists," recalls Saulnier. "Later I found out he was a fan of the band that I sang in," he adds, the irony drawing a rueful laugh. "He had no idea who I was."

Green Room is much more than just a Nazploitation shocker set on hillbilly turf though, and is inspired as much by genre pics as it is by Saulnier's past. "It shares DNA with horror," he says, "in that there's an enclosed environment and you have young people being picked off one-by-one. But its mechanics and aesthetics

are from war movies. On one side of the door you have inept protagonists, and on the other you have soldiers."

Platoon was one war film referenced, as was another Vietnam classic, *Rebels*. Macon Blair, Saulnier's long-standing cohort (he was the lead in *Blue Ruin*, and here plays Darcy's quivering adjutant). "My [*Green Room*] character, Gabe, would be Chef: 'I can't take it, man. I've got to get out of it!'" You wouldn't blame him. The venue — an oppressive, grime-caked club — lends *Carpenter*-esque atmospherics. And you know there's no first-aid kit on site.

Unlike Sam Peckinpah's home-invasion thriller *Straw Dogs*, another of *Green Room*'s touch points, there are no personal grudges at play, only what

Real Deals?

ANDY FARROW, MANAGING DIRECTOR OF NORTHERN MUSIC CO., JUDGES HOW WELL MOVIE BANDS WOULD MAKE IT IN THE REAL WORLD



Citizen Dick (*Singles*, 1992)

"Their song (*Touch Me I'm Dick*) is a parody of Mudhoney: raw, with inane lyrics. Their look is obviously typical of that scene, but I don't think they'd get far today."



Autobahn (*The Big Lebowski*, 1998)

"Nihilists in black leather — what's not to like?! I like the vibe and production, and since tastes seem to be cyclical, they may have a chance of getting signed."



The Venus In Furs (*Velvet Goldmine*, 1998)

"The lyrics are ridiculous, but they do have a great '70s glam vibe. With the right producer this could be of interest in today's market."



Stillwater (*Almost Famous*, 2000)

"They evoke everything good about the '70s: image, great front man. I think despite having a generic sound they'd do well now, as classic rock is very in. It's a thumbs-up!"



Sex Bob-omb (*Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World*, 2010)

"They've got that typical, youthful, innocent indie vibe, and a female drummer, which is cool. That garage rock sound still has interest these days, but the recording needs work."



Leviathan The Fleeing Serpent (*The Lords Of Salem*, 2012)

"As with many black metal bands they have the image, but this is just copying the sound of Gorgoroth and Dark Funeral. They might get signed to a specialist label."

OWEN WILLIAMS

Saulnier terms “hardcore indifference”. This isn’t so much a bullet ballet as a DIY deathmatch, with the inept improvisers taking on hardened killers with whatever comes to hand. It’s crunching, bloody and, yes, very painful to witness.

“It’s people you love, so you hurt when they hurt,” says Blair. “It’s a genre movie but it’s horrific like in real life. Jeremy doesn’t treat it in a celebratory way.” This isn’t a Tarantinoesque world where everyone gets their moment. “The characters aren’t badasses,” he adds. “They don’t get great monologues to deliver and they’re constantly making mistakes.”

Saulnier isn’t trying to be Eli Roth, in other words. There may be a group of young people trapped in a dingy structure, *Hostel*-like, but the violence here is a means to an end, not the end in itself. “It’s never in celebration of a death,” he elaborates of his use of extreme violence. “It’s more about giddy relief that someone survives.” He reaches for an *Austin Powers* reference. “There’s that hilarious aside when the henchman gets killed and you see that they actually have a family back home that you’d never thought about. That was a great gag and it stuck with me.” Unlike the machete fodder of torture porn, Saulnier’s characters come fully formed. Even the villains. Admittedly, they don’t always stay that way.

If the casting choices feel a little off-kilter for a violent genre flick — Professor X as a homicidal Nazi? *Star Trek*’s Chekov as a punk? — they’re meant to. “The characters don’t belong in the movie either,” reasons Saulnier. The aim is to keep viewers off balance, and that starts with casting. Like Dan Stevens in Adam Wingard’s hyperstylised ’80s homage *The Guest*, Stewart fills the Brit-thesp-turned-psycho berth. Not that he sees it that way.

“Two of my greatest successes were playing Macbeth and Shylock,” Stewart tells *Empire*, “so playing a very wicked man is not unusual. The horror-thriller genre is fairly new to me, but it gave me a chance to explore aspects of human nature I’d never had the chance to before.” Stewart likens his character’s approach to violence to a fastidious man planning a dinner party, a parallel his director expands on. “Every act of violence is based on necessity or practicality,” stresses Saulnier. “There’s one unmotivated act of violence, and that’s what sets the whole film in motion.”

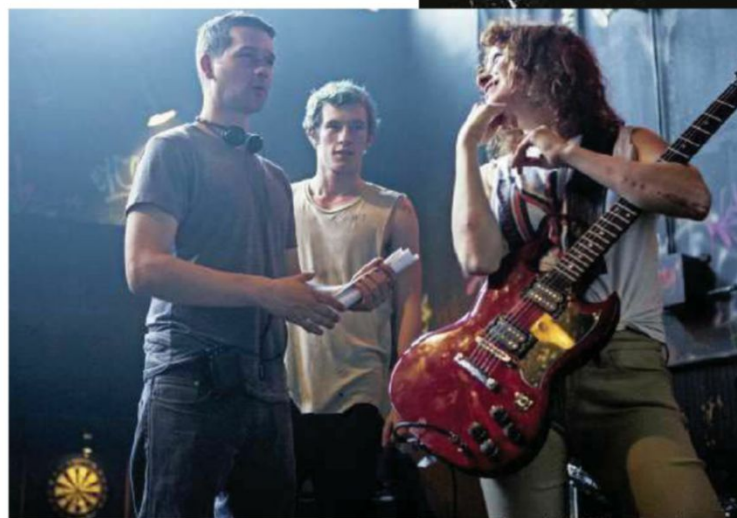
Like his fellow Trekker, Yelchin is on unfamiliar terrain as the gutsy bassist smart enough to turn an amp into an impromptu weapon but not so clever that he’s avoided a situation where he needs to. Imogen Poots, meanwhile, has been

chased by zombies in *28 Weeks Later*, but a fuming redneck sporting a Cletus fringe is still an unlikely choice. “They seemed to really love it,” observes Blair of his co-stars, “and if they didn’t, they made a very convincing show of it.” Stresses Saulnier of their characters: “They’re not idiots, but they’re out of their depth.” This posse has a breakneck 95 minutes to morph from the Wyld Stallyns into *The Wild Bunch*. Crucially, you know not all of them will make it. “I love throwing people off and breaking a few rules,” he says. “It’s about adhering to real human experience and that automatically breaks cinematic convention. If you put real people in these situations, you really do not know where this film is going to go. You can’t do that with superheroes.”

SAULNIER BEGAN BREAKING

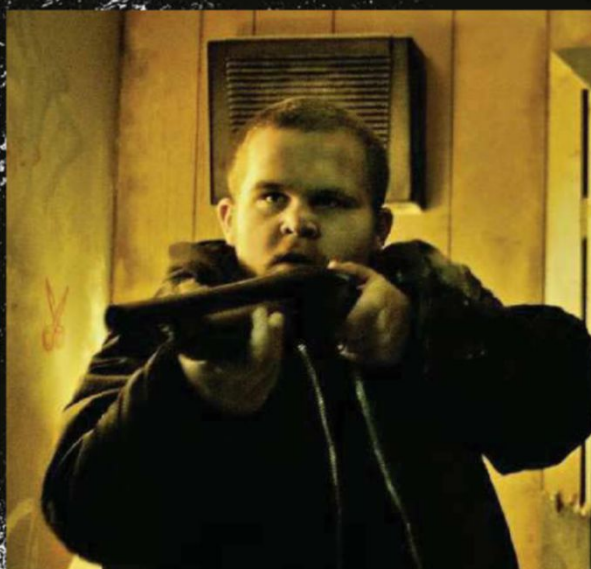
rules 30 years ago. That’s when he first met fellow Virginian high-schooler Macon Blair, and a shared love of *Die Hard* and *Aliens* saw them form a double act. They were soon building replica Colonial Marine pulse rifles at Blair’s house, upsetting the locals in the process.

“My mother thought he was maybe out of control,” grins Blair. “He was kind



of a wild man.” Wild man and sidekick, they started making their own movie homages with a posse of friends. They soon had their first feature, *Megacop*, in the pipeline. “We thought it was a feature,” corrects Saulnier. “It was actually a short.” A crazed stew of *RoboCop*, *Die Hard* and early Verhoeven, *Megacop* mashed up all their favourite action films. Its SFX budget just about stretched to carob syrup for blood, and the firecrackers they’d strap





Clockwise from above: He'll struggle to play that bass; Darcy and his mob up to no good in the woods; This really is a tough crowd; Director Jeremy Saulnier offers pearls of punk-rock wisdom on set.

to their chests and set off in the street. "It was just bad men doing tough things and dispatching despicable thugs in increasingly colourful ways," recalls Blair. "I always met some kind of grisly fate."

While many filmmakers have a dim appreciation of the SFX business, Saulnier doesn't just know his Rick Baker from his Rob Bottin; he understands what they do and why it works. "As a kid I was forced to watch the opening SWAT team scene in *Dawn Of The Dead* over and over in my cousin's basement," he remembers. "They also had a copy of *Friday The 13th Part III*, and they'd play the [bit with the] speargun through Catherine Parks' eye. Rewind it, play, rewind. To cope with the trauma I had to learn how they did it, so I got into make-up."

That ken for old-fashioned effects runs right through *Green Room*. The 31-day shoot, split between a soundstage and an exterior location high in the cedar woods outside Portland, was packed with all the explosive squibs, prosthetics and bleeding rigs a devoted gorehound could wish for. "I think we killed or injured people with a larger variety of weapons than any other film I've worked on," laughs Stephen Prouty, the film's on-set make-up effects supervisor. "You

know its going to be a good day when the crew starts covering the equipment in plastic prior to the cameras rolling".

There's even an homage to Bottin snuck in for good measure. Saulnier hints that "there's a pretty badass headshot where the gore had a hint of *The Thing* about it." Yes, even the Easter eggs in this movie come caked in viscera.

With all that flying plasma, it's no wonder *Green Room* is so wince-inducing: it looks real because, a few CG squibs apart, it is. Prouty feels that "these types of effects have too often gone digital, so it was great fun to dig out the Hudson sprayers, compressed air tanks and the old giant syringes and pump some crimson goodness."

For the first time in his career, Saulnier had the budget (just under \$6 million, up from *Blue Ruin*'s \$420,000) to hire gifted craftsmen like Prouty, an Oscar nominee, and Michael Marino, protégé of the great Dick Smith (*The Exorcist*, *The Godfather*, *Taxi Driver*), to help him realise his vision. Yet while much has changed for him and his friend Blair since those early handcart horrors, plenty has stayed the same. "This was a chance to do the same kind of extreme movie [but] with real resources," points out Blair. "It's

been about figuring out how to support a family doing the exact same things we were doing when we were 15 years old."

AS 'BLOODY SAM' PECKINPAH

liked to say, there is a great streak of violence in every human being. 'Bloody Jeremy' may not have quite the same ring to it, but Saulnier, who's already prepping his next project (an adaptation of William Giraldis' wolves-and-wilderness tale *Hold The Dark*, written by Blair), is exploiting that streak with fresh, disturbing and, yes, bloody entertaining tools. A few — a mic stand, box cutter, fire extinguisher and crimson-stained machete — adorned the *Green Room* post-wrap sweatshirts he handed out as a keepsake, although Blair, for one, will think twice before wearing his back to his mum's place.

"She's a committed pacifist," he says. "She found nice things to say about *Blue Ruin*, but she might have a tougher time finding those things to say with *Green Room*. It goes in a much more extreme direction." Maybe she was right about the wild man thing all along. ■

GREEN ROOM IS OUT ON MAY 13 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.



The Fall Guys



During the golden age of the stuntman, two of its boldest stars, A. J. Bakunas and Dar Robinson, competed to perform the highest-ever fall: a deadly game that would cost one of them his life

WORDS ADAM SMITH

ILLUSTRATION AESTHETIC APPARATUS



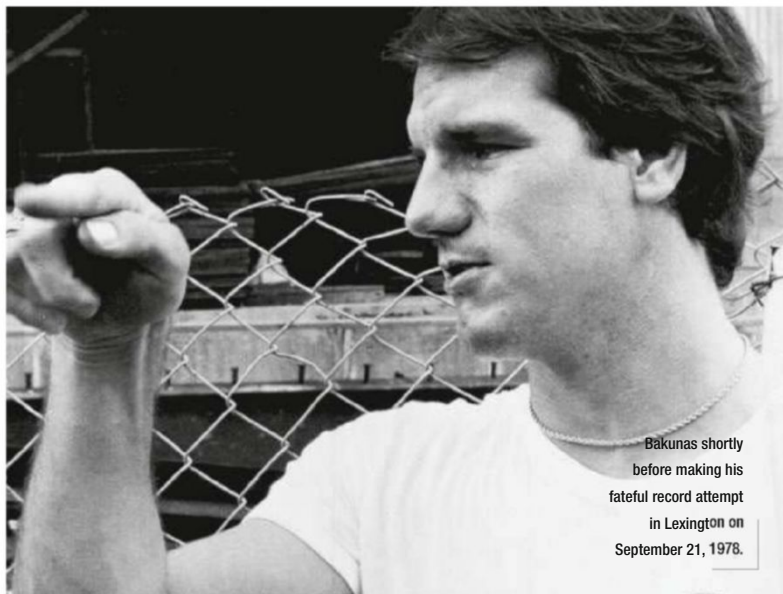
ON THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 21, 1978, a thousand-strong crowd gathered before the 22-storey-high Kincaid Towers in Lexington, Kentucky, drawing as close as it could to a huge, billowing airbag tethered near the building's base. The city had for several weeks been enjoying the novelty of Hollywood being in town. Lexington's modern skyline, with its plentiful supply of half-built office blocks, including Kincaid Towers, had attracted the attention of the location scouts for *Steel*, a now largely forgotten vehicle for Lee Majors and George Kennedy set against the construction industry.

As the film had wrapped only days before, the gathering rubbernecks had thought the circus was over, the main event having already taken place. Six weeks earlier, stuntman A. J. Bakunas, doubling for Kennedy, had flung himself from the ninth storey of Kincaid Towers. But, the press had been informed at short notice, the stunt was now to be repeated. This was to be the *pièce de résistance*. The ninth floor, 130 feet up, was no longer high enough. The fall was now to take place from the very top of the tower: the 22nd floor, 323 feet from the ground. Bakunas had received news that veteran stunt-performer Dar Robinson had, in California just three weeks earlier, broken the world record for the highest fall with a 311-foot drop — a record previously held by Bakunas himself. A record he was now determined to reclaim. This was an even bigger story.

On the building's roof, Bakunas gave a TV interview to *Steel* star Majors: itself an event that would have been unthinkable just a few years before, when stunt performers were figures whose existence was, nominally at least, an industry secret, and didn't even receive screen credits for their risky work. But it was all part of the game these days. The new breed of stuntmen Bakunas represented were now mini

A. J. Bakunas falls 230 feet from a helicopter while making 1978's *Hooper*, breaking the then world record — but not for long.





Bakunas shortly before making his fateful record attempt in Lexington on September 21, 1976.



Bakunas plummeting 323 feet from the roof of Kincaid Towers.

celebrities in their own right. Not only were they now allowed to be photographed next to the stars they doubled for, they were being interviewed by them for TV.

"Go on back and keep preparing, because I want to keep you around," Majors said at the conclusion of the TV spot, slapping Bakunas on the shoulder as the smiling stuntman walked out of frame. Then, turning to the camera, the actor wrapped things up. "Well, it should be exciting. But one thing I'd like to know: are world records worth the risk? It's obvious to A. J. Bakunas that it is. We'll see."

A few hours later Albert John Bakunas, oozing the quiet courage typical of his trade, climbed to the scaffolding-clad viewing deck. He stepped out onto a girder and lowered himself into a hanging position. And then, early in the afternoon, Bakunas, who was a few days shy of his 28th birthday, did what he had done dozens of times before. He paused, centred himself, and listened for the crackle of a walkie-talkie.

Then, when finally he heard it, he pushed himself backwards and fell into the air.

NO-ONE KNOWS WHO performed the first high fall for Hollywood's action-hungry cameras. It certainly wouldn't have been anyone who would have recognised themselves as a 'stuntman'.

Back in the earliest days of the silents, any half-risky action was performed by common-or-garden extras willing to topple off a shop frontage for an extra couple of dollars on top of their five bucks-a-day pay. It was a self-selecting group liberally populated by chancers, drunks and the insane.

According to John Baxter in his magisterial history of the nascent industry, *Stunt: The Story Of The Great Movie Stuntmen*, one of the earliest recorded high falls was performed by a Native American who went by the name 'Eagle Eye'. During the filming of D. W. Griffith's 1916 epic *Intolerance*, Eagle Eye's fighting skills impressed the director so he was asked if he would mind leaping into a waiting hay cart. Eagle performed the move perfectly, only to find himself careering away in the cart led by the panicked horse, and was, it is reported, not seen until the next day.

What Eagle Eye's story illustrates — apart from the importance of a modicum

of foresight in stunt work — is that the history of falling goes hand in hand with the history of landing.

"In the early days they would use sawhorses with two by fours put across, with mattresses stacked over the top of that," says John Hagner, a Utah-based retired stunt performer and founder of the Hollywood Stuntmen's Hall Of Fame. "Then there was a famous stuntman working in the '20s and '30s called Richard Talmage. He invented a canvas mattress, packed with stuffing. We still call them Talmage pads."

The next breakthrough in what stuntmen call the 'catcher' came by accident. A catastrophic fire at a packaging factory in New York saw panicked workers leaping out of fourth-storey windows into piles of cardboard boxes, many surviving falls that should have killed them. Over in Hollywood, the stunt industry took note.

"The secret was in the way they were stacked," says Hagner. "If you stack them close together then they don't really cave in so you're going to have a hard landing. But if you put them about four inches apart they give way. When I did my first fall in 1960, I used cardboard boxes and a couple of Talmage pads and I fell 38 feet. Back in those days you never really fell any more than 40 feet or 45 feet."

As the technology of the high fall developed, the profession of 'stuntman' slowly established itself. The first wave emerged from the two-reel comedies churned out by Mack Sennett — the term for an individual stunt, a 'gag', has its roots in these early days when the desired response was more likely a belly laugh than a gasp. But by the '60s the industry was, according to some of its members, moribund, ripe for a revolution. And at the centre of this seismic shift would be three men: Hal Needham, Burt Reynolds and Dar Allen Robinson.

THINGS WENT CRAZY FOR a while," says director Richard Donner, whose *Lethal Weapon* was the apotheosis of the stunt-orientated action pictures that dominated the industry through the 1970s and well into the '80s. "It was like what you see with CGI these days. It has to be bigger and more ambitious than the last movie. Everybody wanted to do something wilder and more difficult than the guy before, and the studios felt that was going to make their picture that much more saleable. They were relatively safe and smart in the beginning and then they lost control of it. It got too big." >



Dar Robinson, whom Donner employed to conceive and perform many of *Lethal Weapon*'s spectacular falls, was the outlier of the new, inventive and highly competitive stuntman. A former trampoline champion, he had made his high-fall debut doubling for Steve McQueen in *Papillon* (1973), diving 100 feet into water. "Dar was a genius at the high fall," says Donner. "He had many totally new rigs which he had invented. He made falls totally magical."

Frustrated by the limitations presented by boxes and Talmage pads, Robinson began to look for ways that the high fall could be modified, and with his stunt engineer Ky Michaelson found the solution. "They had a lot to do with the invention of the airbag," says Hagner. "It emerged in the late '60s, after which they started to go to over 100 feet. Essentially it's a giant nylon bag which is vented and inflated. When you land, the air is forced through the vents, breaking your fall." With this, Robinson and other stuntmen could perform falls from heights unimaginable a few years before.

"Stunts were relatively safe, then they lost control of it." **Richard Donner**

And stuntmen were suddenly everywhere. Movies like *Smokey And The Bandit* (1977) and *The Cannonball Run* (1981) led to a public obsession with the men and women who delivered this incomparably violent spectacle. *Death Cheaters* (1976), *Animal* (1977), and *The Stunt Man* (1980), as well as films about motorcycle showman Evel Knievel, all scored hits at the box office, while on TV, Lee Majors' *The Fall Guy* (1981-1986) would deliver weekly stunts to a public hungry for outrageous risk-taking, and specials like *Stunt Wars* simply presented stunts for their own sake.

Key to the sudden emergence from the shadows of the stuntman as a new kind of star was the friendship between stuntman Hal Needham and peak A-lister Burt Reynolds. Needham, a former paratrooper and tree-climber, had met Reynolds when he doubled for the then-unknown actor on the set of TV series *Riverboat*, and the two forged an enduring friendship. By 1970, Needham had become increasingly unhappy with what he saw as the cliquish way the industry was run, with the venerable Stuntmen's

Association Of Motion Pictures doling out work and, as Needham saw it, discouraging inventiveness. So he rocked the business by splitting from SAMP and founding his own group, Stunts Unlimited.

Originally composed of a dozen or so young stunt performers (though Dar Robinson remained affiliated with SAMP), Stunts Unlimited prided itself on the technical innovation and scale of the stunts its members would attempt. And typical of the kind of new, hungry talent that Needham sought to cultivate was A. J. Bakunas.

Born in Fort Lee, New Jersey, Bakunas had been a high-school pole-vault champion and then gym instructor before moving to Hollywood and breaking into the stunt business, making his debut in Sidney Lumet's *Dog Day Afternoon* (1975). He'd also worked on Walter Hill's gang-war movie *The Warriors* (where he can be briefly spotted as a roller-skating gang member in the movie's 'restroom rumble'). "Some people say I'm crazy to keep doing stunts. I don't think it's any crazier than working eight hours a day



Dar Robinson leaps from a helicopter during his record-breaking free fall on September 2, 1978.



Robinson shows off his new airbag safety device on February 26, 1974.

in a stuffy office," he once said.

Though both organisations placed safety to the fore, the schism was a controversial move, and it injected a new edge of competitiveness into the business. "I don't know whether it was really good for the industry or not," says Donner. "I think there had been animosity. There was a sense of the two organisations competing with each other for a while, who had the biggest pair of *cojones*."

After Needham's directorial debut, *Smokey And The Bandit*, proved a money-spinner, he and Reynolds saw an opportunity to propel stunt performers from industry secret to attraction in their own right. *The Stuntman*, a flimsy screenplay about a fading fall guy's friendship with a young rival, was rewritten for Reynolds and became *Hooper* (1978), to be directed by Needham. "Because there didn't have to be any continuity, *Hooper* would have any stunt I could dream up," Needham wrote later. "Car jumps, fights, explosions and high falls." And, keen to cement Stunts Unlimited as a new industry force, Needham incorporated the company



Plunging 286 feet, Robinson falls towards an airbag of his own design during the 1978 record attempt.

into the screenplay.

Key to the plot was a fall from a helicopter, performed by Reynolds' character. It was no accident the planned gag would establish a new record — as it does in the script — and further burnish Stunts Unlimited's reputation for groundbreaking work. Though, like most stunt performers, he could turn his hand to anything, Needham was primarily a car-crash expert. So he called a rising talent in the field of falling down: A. J. Bakunas. Doubling for Reynolds, Bakunas performed the stunt flawlessly, tumbling from the hovering chopper 232 feet into a waiting airbag and crashing into the record books at the same instant.

It's easy to understand why Robinson would see a younger guy breaking world records using the very airbag technology he'd helped develop as a challenge to be met. So on September 2, 1978, at California theme park Knott's Berry Farm, with cameras from NBC's *Super Stunt II* rolling, he did just that: leaping 311 feet from a helicopter onto a 60-by-120-foot airbag, and beating Bakunas' fall by 79 feet.

Out in Lexington, Kentucky, *Steel* was still in production when Bakunas received news that his hard-won world record had only lasted a few months. And only three weeks after Robinson's jump, Bakunas decided to retrieve his crown.

A. J. WAS USING TWO airbags," says John Hagner of the fall that would kill Bakunas. "One was sewn into the other, so there was an outer bag and a slightly smaller inner bag. The outer bag gave way and the inner bag didn't hold him — it was nowhere near enough to break his fall on its own. That's why he went straight to the ground."

Dr. Jud Chalkley was acting as medical advisor to the production. "At first they said everything was fine," he recalled years later. "Then there was this *oh my gosh* moment when they realised that the airbag had ruptured."

Chalkley, who was on hand at the Good Samaritan Hospital's emergency room when Bakunas was admitted, remembers him arriving conscious but horrifically injured. Having hit the airbags at a velocity of around 80 miles per hour, Bakunas had shattered both his hips and both his shoulder blades. "He grabbed my arm with a look of desperation... You could see in his eyes the fear and the fact that he recognised me and was looking to me to help him." Tragically, Chalkley and the emergency room team were unable to save him, owing to the stuntman's massive

internal injuries. "The deceleration caused tremendous damage to his lungs," said Chalkley, who operated on Bakunas overnight, transfusing 15 pints of blood in an attempt to control the hemorrhaging. "The individual lung cells had disintegrated as a result of the impact."

Bakunas died at 9.45am the next morning. "I had told the director, I had told the producer and I had told A. J. that I didn't think it was a good idea," remembered Chalkley. "We had the film in the can. I'm still disappointed in myself that I couldn't have done more to prevent the jump happening."

Dar Robinson continued his radical technical innovations, one of which was the 'descender', or 'decelerator', which made the need for airbags less necessary. Essentially a highly reliable pneumatic break, it allowed stunt performers to use thin wires for high falls, and for directors to shoot downwards into the fall, until digital technology meant they could remove the wire entirely.

Robinson's record was finally broken at a promotional event for The Vegas World Hotel in 1984, when stuntman Dan Koko was paid \$1 million to jump 326 feet from the building's roof (though the achievement is unofficial, as Guinness World Records ceased recording the category for a time after Bakunas' death). Then, in 1997, Danish stuntman Stig Günther jumped 343 feet from a crane into an airbag, a height that remains unsurpassed to this day.

"Dar once told me he wanted to do 1,000 feet," says John Hagner. "If there was anybody who could have figured a way to do it, and do it safely, it would have been him."

Sadly, Robinson will never get the chance. In November 1986, while performing a relatively simple motorcycle 'drive by' shot on low-budget thriller *Million Dollar Mystery*, he lost control of his bike, plunging off a 40-foot ravine and fatally impaling himself on a cactus limb. Compared to Bakunas' death it was a low-key end for a man who had made a living pushing the envelope of stunt work.

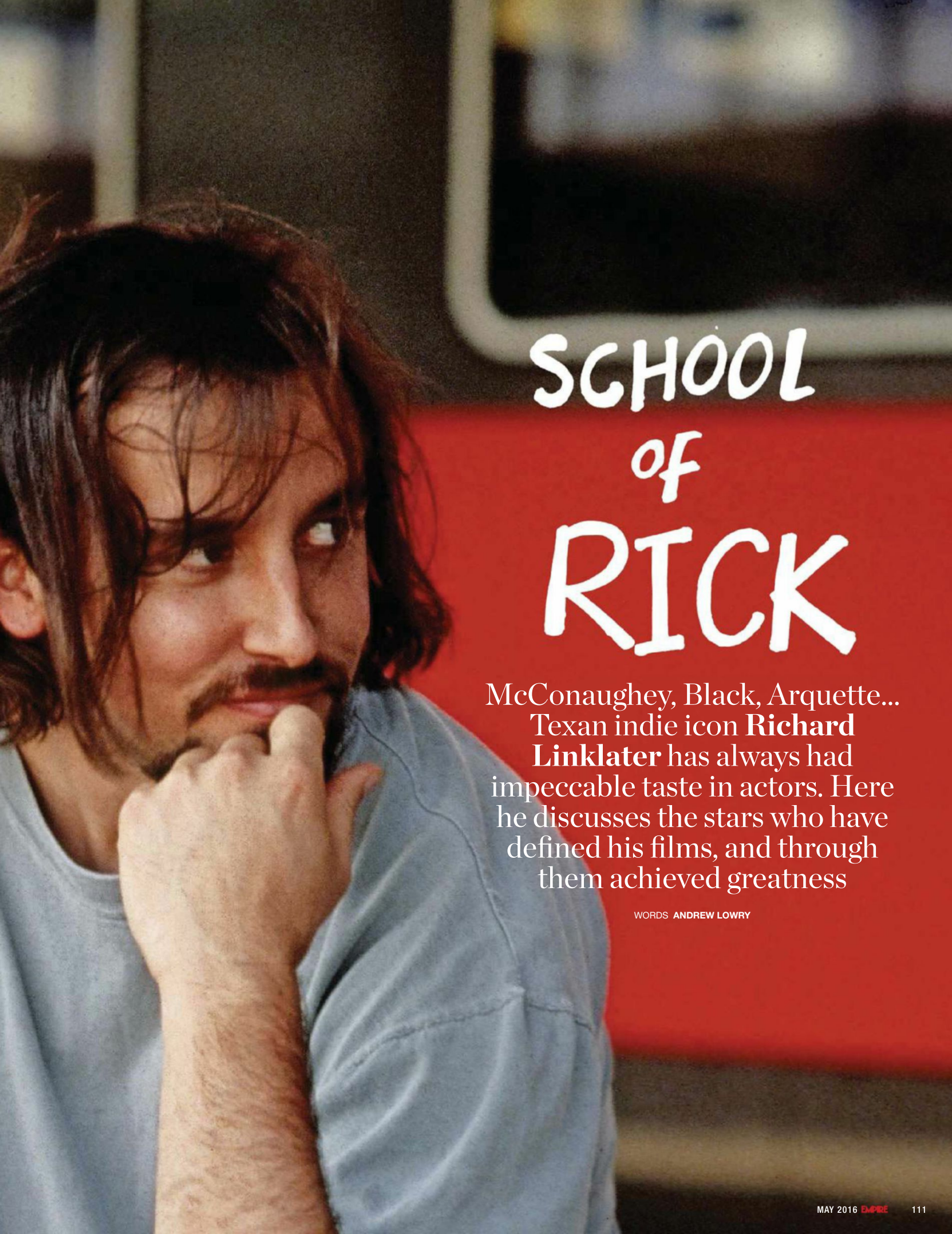
"There's no such thing as a 'small' stunt," says Richard Donner. "Anything those guys do has the potential to go wrong, even when they plan it every which way, like Dar always did."

Donner would dedicate *Lethal Weapon* to Robinson's memory. But it's hard to watch its spectacular falls and not think of it as a memorial to Bakunas, too. And to a strange moment in time, nearly 40 years ago, when two men dreamed of taking the business of falling down to ever greater heights. ■

Robinson beside Toronto's CN Tower on August 11, 1980. The next day he'd jump off the top, attached to a 3mm steel descender cable.





A portrait of Richard Linklater, a man with long dark hair and a mustache, resting his chin on his hand and looking thoughtfully to the side. He is wearing a light blue t-shirt. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a red wall.

SCHOOL of RICK

McConaughey, Black, Arquette...
Texan indie icon **Richard Linklater** has always had impeccable taste in actors. Here he discusses the stars who have defined his films, and through them achieved greatness

WORDS ANDREW LOWRY

I

F YOU'RE LOOKING for common threads in Richard Linklater's incredibly diverse body of work, you're not making it home before dark. From the amiable indie hangouts (*Dazed And Confused*, new film *Everybody Wants Some!!*) to the rotoscoped

experiments (*Waking Life*, *A Scanner Darkly*) by way of the studio comedies (*School Of Rock*, *Bad News Bears*) and the unexpected tangents (*Fast Food Nation*, *Me And Orson Welles*), you'll need quite a roadmap if you're looking to take the whole lot in. And that's without even mentioning the meditations on time, love and a whole lot else on which his reputation rests: *Boyhood*, and *Before Sunset*, *Sunrise* and *Midnight*.

Linklater's been kind enough to offer you a few guides, though, working with the same rotating company of actors, time and again. "You find an actor who's right for the part," he says, "and if you've already worked together, you have a shorthand. When you've built up that bond, you can really have somebody on board as a collaborator, instead of just an actor you hire. I love that — you need all the ideas you can get, so why not surround yourself with the smartest people?"

This year's *Everybody Wants Some!!* confirms him as one of the best handlers of actors around. Among his cast of young unknowns, who play members of a college baseball team in turn-of-the-'80s Texas, there's not a single weak link. Whether they're already stars, future stars, or just people he found on the street, Linklater's taste in actors is second to none.

THE KING OF TEXAS

MATTHEW McCONAUGHEY

Dazed And Confused (1993), *The Newton Boys* (1998), *Bernie* (2011)

The story of Matthew McConaughey's casting in *Dazed And Confused* is semi-legendary: the casting director met him in a bar, suggested he come in the next day to read for the part of horndog Wooderson, and a thousand "Alrights" were born.

Too good to be true? Kind of: Linklater is keen to stress he didn't magic McConaughey from the ether. "The thing is," he says, "Matthew was always going to be Matthew. I gave him



Matthew McConaughey's memorable performance as the 'older' Wooderson in *Dazed And Confused*.



As gun-wielding bank robber Willis Newton in *The Newton Boys*. Below: As District Attorney Danny Buck in black comedy *Bernie*.



"TOTALLY ILLOGICAL"



THE ONE WHO WALKED AWAY

WILEY WIGGINS

Dazed And Confused (1993),
Waking Life (2001)

A fair number of *Dazed* alumni went on to big things — aside from McConaughey, Ben Affleck and Milla Jovovich both went on to stopped-in-the-street levels of fame — but there's one name that stands out among the leads as having almost totally walked away from movies. And what a name: "As soon as Wiley came in," says Linklater, who cast him in the central role of Mitch, "he didn't know it, but I already wanted him because of his awesome name."

Wiley Wiggins has dabbled in acting since his charming turn in *Dazed* — most recently in Andrew Bujalski's fantastic *Computer Chess* (2013) — but never took it as seriously as some of his more ambitious peers, and is now a respected blogger on tech, computers and their legal and cultural impact. "He's driven in different ways," says Linklater. "He's a really cerebral guy. He used to blow my mind — he was so ahead of the curve on digital culture, even back then. I learned a lot from him."

In an industry where everybody daydreams about their Oscar acceptance speech, Wiggins' lack of interest in fame is pretty refreshing. "After *Dazed*, Wiley was offered every bad summer-camp movie going," says Linklater, "and he would just flat-out say to me, 'I'm not going to do that bullshit.' I would say, 'Wiley, man, you're 16 and it's \$100,000, if the film sucks it isn't on you,' but it wasn't for him."

Linklater was eventually able to lure Wiggins back, though, for his pioneering and philosophical *Waking Life*, where real footage was rotoscoped to create a woozy, disorientating feel for a series of vignettes ranging from the absurd to the profound.

"We did *Waking Life* about seven years later, and I didn't think of anybody else for the part. I just had to tell him I was making this really weird movie, and he just got it — he's a super well-read guy, and he could click into what we were going for, no problem. He's a computer guy, and he went on to work on one of the animation teams as well. I think that might be a world first, an actor working on animating himself." ➤

a jumpstart, but that kind of star quality was always going to out. It was a classic case of preparation meeting opportunity."

Unlike a lot of McConaughey defenders worried he'd been lost forever to movies whose posters saw him leaning against Kate Hudson, Linklater wasn't surprised by the McConaissance, which saw the star emerge from years in romcoms to win an Oscar (for *Dallas Buyers Club*). "What Matthew brings to the table is that he was a film major from the get go — the only one in his fraternity — so he was always thinking in terms of storytelling. He's a filmmaker at heart, but he found his channel to telling stories through playing these characters. He'll think deeply about his part not just in terms of character, but in the function in the wider story, and not a lot of actors do that."

It's one thing to know how to make a movie, and to know film history, but McConaughey's not the sort to content himself with a Brando or De Niro impression and knock off at five.

"Matthew knows movies backwards, but he's not about referencing or imitating these great actors of the past. What he'll do is look at people in life, whether it's his dad or older brother or the guy he sits next to on a plane, and make them his reference points. He's always studying people; you can see him do it. That's why he was so perfect in *Bernie*. He's lived in East Texas. It's its own little world, and he understood that instinctively. There was no shortage of crazy characters for him to get his teeth into, and you can still see it in his work today. The East Texas thing was definitely something we bonded over."

"Cerebral" Wiley Wiggins as Mitch in *Dazed And Confused*.



Ethan Hawke with Patricia Arquette and Ashley Johnson in *Fast Food Nation*. Below right: Linklater on location with Hawke and Julie Delpy for *Before Sunrise*.

THE RENAISSANCE MAN ETHAN HAWKE

Before Sunrise (1995), *The Newton Boys* (1998), *Waking Life* (2001), *Tape* (2001), *Before Sunset* (2004), *Fast Food Nation* (2006), *Before Midnight* (2013), *Boyhood* (2014)

Ethan Hawke and Linklater first met more than two decades ago, and their working relationship has lasted right up to last year's Oscars (for *Boyhood*), and is likely to go beyond. "I had no idea in 1994 that we would end up doing so many things together," says Linklater. "Not that I'm complaining."

As with McConaughey, it was a relationship that started almost by chance: Linklater met Hawke when he was in a play with *Dazed* cast member Anthony Rapp. "Ethan was this 23 year-old guy, and it was his theatre company. He just had, and has, this creative energy that's incredible. He was painting, he was writing songs, he'd written a novel, and the summer we were in Vienna for *Sunrise* he'd directed the biggest music video around (for *Lisa Loeb's Stay (I Missed You)*). I was looking for the smartest, most creative, articulate guy (for the part of *American-abroad Jesse*), and I was lucky to find Ethan. We started talking, and we haven't stopped."

Longevity isn't just what stands out about Linklater and Hawke's relationship. In many ways, time is what they've both been examining, whether by accident in the *Before* trilogy, or by design in *Boyhood*. For *Before Sunset* and *Before Midnight*, Hawke and co-star Julie Delpy both moved up to become writers, and the films are as much about the actors considering life's milestones as they are about their on-screen avatars having a chinwag.

Hawke, Linklater insists, is still the same guy as the kid Linklater first worked with. "He's had the ups and downs we all have, it's come out of him in interesting ways. A lot of our films have had that idea underpinning them, and who better to do them with than Ethan, who's always thinking about the way time has a bearing on all of us? He knows the difference between something that's pretty good and something that's really good, and how hard to work to bridge that gap."

THE SUCKER PUNCH PATRICIA ARQUETTE

Fast Food Nation (2006), *Boyhood* (2014)

Patricia Arquette may not have appeared in as many Linklater films as Hawke or McConaughey (or, indeed, Julie Delpy), but with *Boyhood* being shot in 12 chunks over as many years, that's a longer



Star turn: Patricia Arquette as Olivia in her Oscar-winning performance in *Boyhood*. Above right: Jack Black throws the horns as music teacher Dewey Finn in *School Of Rock*.





relationship than most Hollywood marriages. And most marriages don't result in an Oscar.

"Patricia is so real and instinctual," he says. "She's like the mom of the world to me: if there's an earthquake in Haiti, she'll go to Haiti to help. I knew she had been a mom early in her life, and we were both interested in exploring motherhood in a way that hadn't really been done on film before."

For many of the *Boyhood* shoots, Arquette was juggling Linklater's film with a lead role on *Medium*, and US TV shows aren't known for their generous schedules. But it wasn't tough for her to switch back into *Boyhood* mode.

"Consistency wasn't the hardest part for Patricia at all. She has this thing a lot of actors have where once a character is established, they can slip back into it any time. Say you run into an old friend you haven't seen for years, and in seconds it's like all that time melts away and you pick up the conversation. We wouldn't talk for six, eight months, then we would work very intensely over the phone. We'd talk about everything, from what furniture her character could afford in a given year, to whether or not this was what we called a 'recovery' year, where she was processing what had happened to her."

Arquette is the key player in *Boyhood*'s signature scene, where her son (Ellar Coltrane) is leaving for college and the weight of life's disappointments seems close to crushing her — but the strength is still there. It's a devastating performance. "That was the last scene we shot with Patricia," says Linklater, "and I barely had to say anything. It wasn't just her character saying goodbye to her son, it was her saying goodbye to these 12 years of working together. It's the biggest emotional moment of the film, and could have been melodramatic, but she doesn't overplay a second. We worked on tiny things, little details and tonal things to get right, but that scene's all Patricia. I was just, 'Wow...'"

THE REAL DEAL

JACK BLACK

School Of Rock (2003), *Bernie* (2011)

Linklater's two films with Jack Black have given the actor two fantastic opportunities: *School Of Rock*'s Dewey Finn was a key part in establishing Black's wild, brash on-screen persona; then eight years later, the title character in true-life black comedy *Bernie* did interesting, unexpected things with it.

Surprisingly, it sounds like the ebullient Black needed some reassurance on the set of *School Of Rock*. "He would come up to me and ask, 'Hey, is this funny?' I had to keep telling him we were okay. It's just that my approach to comedy is very precise, and I think Jack's is, too. It's not about just entertaining the people there on set. We worked together by deciding *how* it was going to be funny — not just throwing a bunch of shit at the wall and seeing what sticks."

In *Bernie*, Black kept his rock-god soul suppressed to deliver the performance of his career as a small-town mortician emotionally abused by a wealthy widow. It's a contained, sweet performance, as a meek man whose community likes him enough to back him in a murder trial.

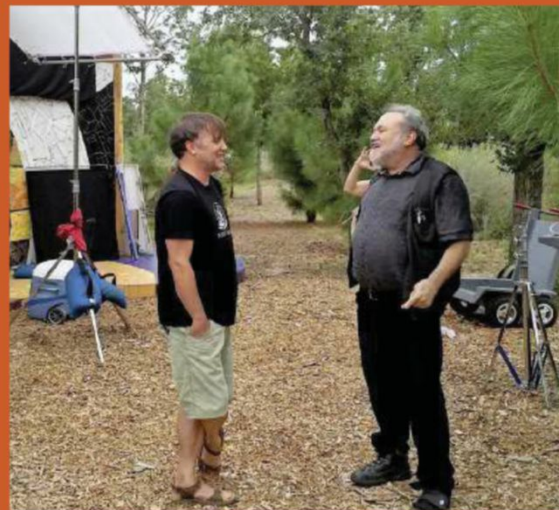
"It was a very scary part for him to take on," says Linklater. "We talked about using the part of himself that wants to be liked too much. With a guy who can go big like Jack can, you get interesting things when you get him to repress it, not least because people are familiar with how big he has it in him to go. Jack's the real deal, man: we had to get so detailed in his performance as Bernie, and he went with it all the way. It's a shame more people didn't see it."

It's a shame indeed: Black has since then retreated to his comedy wheelhouse, and it's likely to be a while before we get another *Bernie* out of him.

EVERYBODY WANTS SOME!! IS OUT ON MAY 13 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.

"HE JUST HAS IT," IN HIS BLOOD

LOUIS BLACK, FOUNDER OF THE SXSW FESTIVAL, ON WHY LINKLATER WAS THE PERFECT SUBJECT FOR HIS LATEST DOCUMENTARY FEATURE



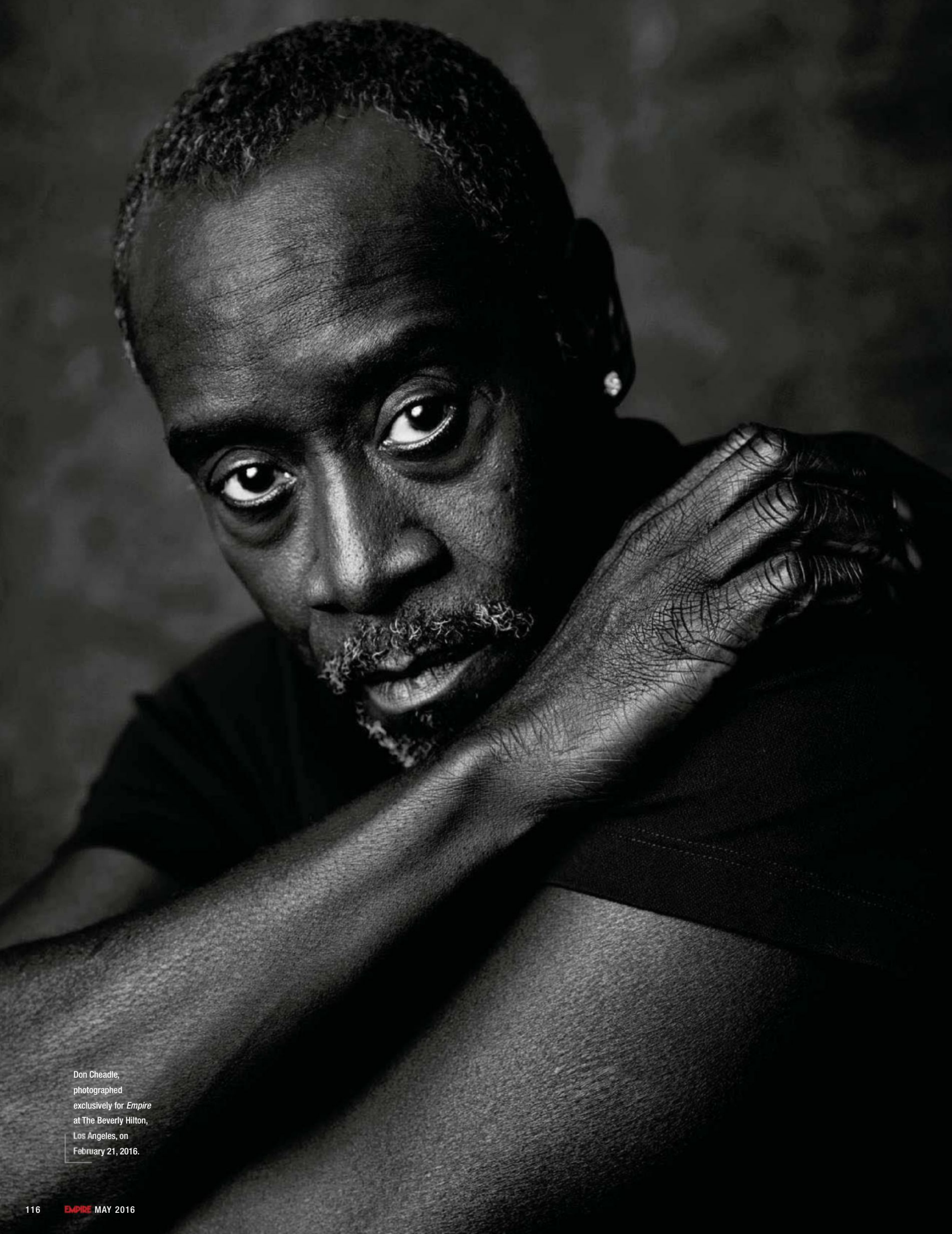
→ Louis Black has known Richard (or Rick, to his friends) Linklater for nigh-on 30 years, even appearing in 1991's *Slacker*, and is set to release *Dream Is Destiny*, an exhaustive documentary portrait of Linklater, his career and working methods.

"I first interviewed him for public access TV in Austin when he was making *Slacker*, and even then he was confident in himself as a director," he says. "Not in an arrogant way, but he just has it in his blood. If you look at those early films running up to *Dazed And Confused*, the learning curve is amazing — he found his feet in no time."

Linklater has always been an outlier of the '90s indie generation: he's a bit older than most of his peers, and not for him a move to LA, or a descent into pastiche. "He knows everything there is to know about film," Black explains, "but you won't find a single shot in his films that's about another film. He's all about immediacy, in creating these stories that feel so natural, but are carefully constructed narratives. There's a directness, whether it's in something fun, or something more bruising like *Before Midnight*. His films are always accessible, even when they're about the biggest ideas around."

Black traces this honesty to Linklater's East Texas roots, and his refusal to leave it behind. "If he worked in France or New York, he might get taken more seriously, but the films would be different. It's part of a commitment to community that Rick has: nothing that's happened in the Austin film world, from SXSW on down, would have happened if he had left for Hollywood. Even for that alone, he would be important, but he's made these extensive and erudite films that don't feel restrictive or confining, or feel like they're just speaking about or to a certain class of people. That's a major achievement for any filmmaker."

RICHARD LINKLATER: DREAM IS DESTINY IS OUT LATER THIS YEAR.



Don Cheadle,
photographed
exclusively for *Empire*
at The Beverly Hilton,
Los Angeles, on
February 21, 2016.

THE **EMPIRE** INTERVIEW

BOULDER AS BRASS

Marvel hero Don Cheadle on why he suffered a “trail of tears” to direct as well as star in his long-gestating biopic of troubled jazz-master Miles Davis

WORDS IAN FREER PORTRAITS STEVE SCHOFIELD

“And I didn’t even have to take my pants off!”

announces Don Cheadle to his team as he emerges, unscathed, from *Empire*’s photo shoot before settling in for his grilling. We are with the 51 year-old actor — now-writer/director/actor — at The Beverly Hilton hotel, 90210. Later this evening he will be guest of honour at the American Black Film Festival Awards, where he will receive an Excellence In The Arts award from his *Iron Man*/*Avengers* co-star Robert Downey Jr.. In a few hours, the hotel will be an opulent, starry red-carpet extravaganza, but at 2pm on a Sunday it looks like a Midlands Conference Centre in the ’80s, a study in the type of beige that Dulux colour charts term ‘Deadening Soullessness’. Happily, Cheadle has life and energy to spare.

He’s so engaged with chatting he doesn’t touch his lunch, and is as happy joking about how he approached *Boogie Nights* (“Just a lot of sex and drugs. I’m a Method actor. Didn’t want to do it. Had to do it”) as he is talking frankly about his own distant relationship with the Academy Awards and this year’s diversity debate. And in case you were wondering, his London accent, last heard in *Ocean’s Thirteen*, has got so much better.

Two very different streams of Cheadle’s creativity are flowing this April. At the end of the month he returns for the fourth time as James ‘Rhodey’ Rhodes, aka War Machine, in *Captain America: Civil War*. But first up is *Miles Ahead*, a ballsy biopic of jazz visionary Miles Davis, co-written by, directed and starring Cheadle. Oh, and he part-financed it and played trumpet, too.

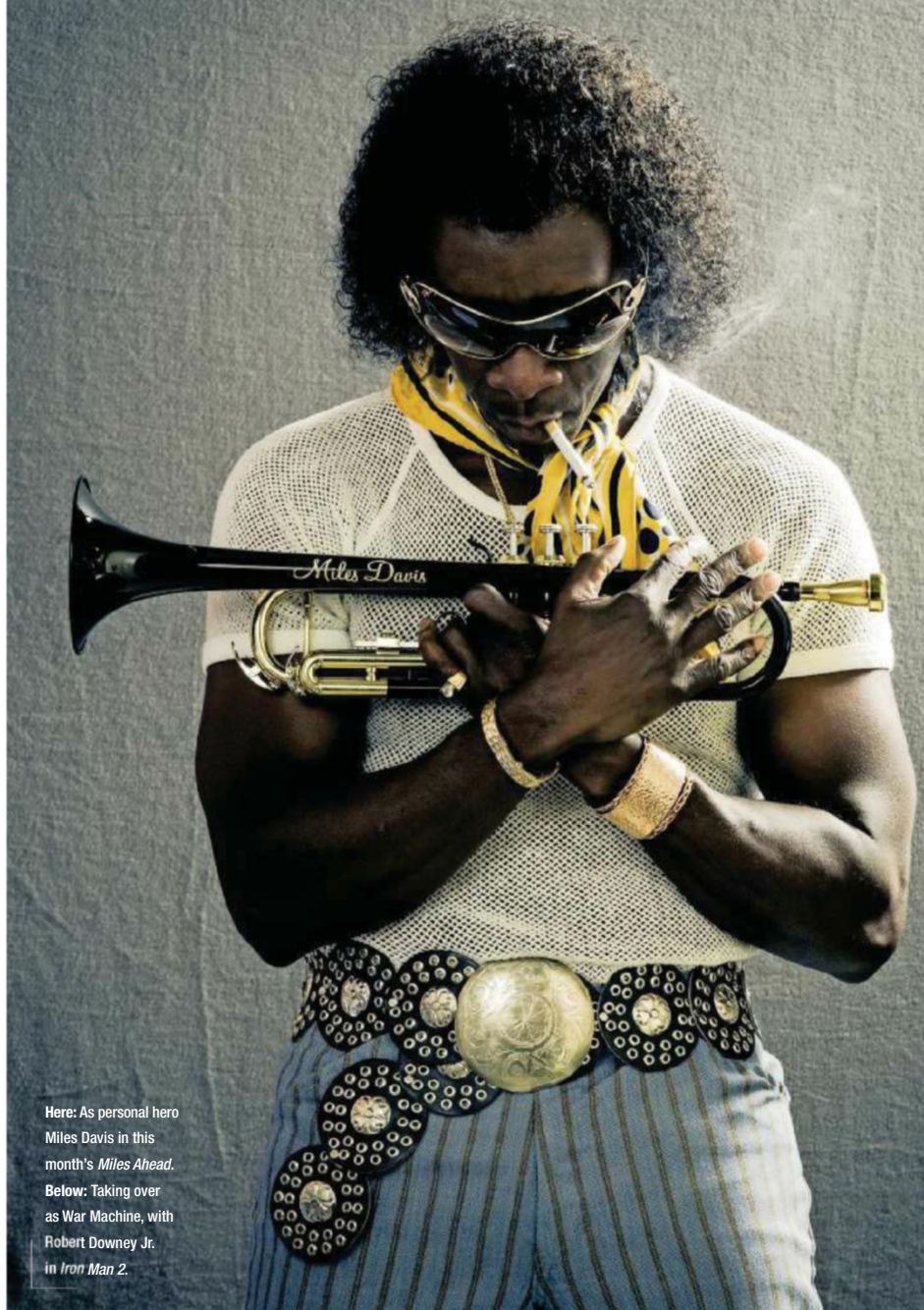
Taking his cue from his subject matter, his feature-directing debut eschews the womb-to-tomb hagiography approach for something that takes risks (it centres on the period of Davis’ writer’s block rather than his genius), throwing in car chases, shoot-outs, fragmented flashbacks and Ewan McGregor as a journalist trying to get the scoop on Davis’ creative impasse. The project landed on the actor’s lap when, at Davis’ induction into the 2006 Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, the musician’s nephew, Vince Wilburn, announced Cheadle was to play his uncle without the actor’s prior knowledge or consent. But the reality is that Cheadle’s obsession with Davis’ “social music” (the trumpeter hated the term ‘jazz’) is lifelong.

When did you first discover Miles Davis?

My parents listened to Miles so it was probably playing in the background before I had conscious awareness of it. But for me, I clearly became a fan around fifth or sixth grade when I would dig through my parents’ records and sort of came up on him, Cannonball Adderley and others.

What do you like about him?

The fact that he is able to deal with so many different genres and the fact that he flouts expectations of himself as a musician, that he is impossible to close the parenthesis around and define as one specific musician. He is someone who reinvented



Here: As personal hero Miles Davis in this month's *Miles Ahead*. Below: Taking over as War Machine, with Robert Downey Jr. in *Iron Man 2*.





Getting down in *Boogie Nights* (1997) as porn star Buck Swope.



As Detective Waters in 2004's *Crash*, which Cheadle also produced.



Hotel Rwanda (2004) saw Cheadle receive a Best Actor Oscar nomination.



Cockney sparrer Basher Tarr makes his debut in *Ocean's Eleven* (2001).

FOOTNOTES

① Julian Edwin 'Cannonball' Adderley was a renowned jazz alto saxophonist who played with Miles Davis on the landmark *Kind Of Blue* album. His nickname is a derivation of 'Cannibal', due to his voracious appetite.

② During the project's long gestation, George Clooney sent Cheadle a prank letter on Brad Pitt's letterhead reading: "Hey Don, I just bought the rights to this Miles Davis project and I got Jamie Foxx on board already. I just wondered if I could tug on your coat awhile to see what kind of music I should be using."

③ *Toto Le Héros* is a 1991 Jaco Van Dormael film that creates a mosaic of flashbacks and fantasy sequences as an old man (Michel Bouquet) looks back on his life. Cheadle will have been influenced by the deft way it moves between past and present.

④ *Round Midnight* is a 1986 Bertrand Tavernier film about an ageing alcoholic jazz musician (Dexter Gordon) who befriends a film-poster designer in modern-day Paris. It features Martin Scorsese in a small role.

himself many, many times. That to me is fascinating. It's like Tiger Woods changing his swing after he's won five majors. Very few people find a sweet spot where they are getting a lot of adulation and go, "Okay, next?"

You've said you wanted to make a film that "felt like Miles, not about Miles". What does that mean?

The intention was always to tell a story that felt impressionistic and improvisational, and I wanted to approach it as Miles approached his métier as opposed to going, "Let me just check off a bunch of boxes about all of the achievements in his life." I wanted to do something with film that I felt he had done so successfully with music, and go into an unknown place and challenge myself.

Did you meet resistance from his family?

We had 'come-to-Jesus' moments where we had to talk to the family and explain, then re-explain what we wanted to do. We had to keep reinforcing the idea that we could make his movie in a very traditional way, going from cradle to grave, but all of those things were just reducing its footprint and making it smaller. We wanted to open this thing up as opposed to making a perfect jewel that can only be enjoyed by a certain number of people. So when we had that discussion, they would stretch and groan and go, "Okay man, this shit better work."

Is it true that the financiers insisted you have a white actor as a co-star?

The truth is that casting is always a component when it comes to financing. Having an international actor — not necessarily a white actor — was about finding ways to attract more people into the pot.

Did you ask some of the directors you've worked with for advice?

George Clooney ①, PTA (*Paul Thomas Anderson*), Steven Soderbergh, Carl Franklin. I tapped 'em all. You would expect to hear more instructive things but I was told, "Make sure you get sleep and do your push-ups and stay healthy. Wake up with a plan every day and [make sure] that you execute it as closely as you can, knowing that it is going to fall apart."

What films inspired you?

We looked at a movie like *Toto Le Héros* ③, which was one of our ideas about the way we would do this. Movies like *All That Jazz*, *Round Midnight* ④ and *Little Big Man*. We looked at everything and stole from as many great places as we could. I sat next to *Run Lola Run* director Tom Tykwer in Berlin last week. He said, "I haven't seen your film yet." And I said, "Well, when you see it, you'll see you in it. You'll see what I stole." He was like, "Oh yeah, I do that all the time. That's how you do it."

You've directed theatre and TV. Was it a sharp learning curve directing a feature?

It's something I didn't want to do four or five years ago. I tried to hire another director. It just felt overwhelming and that it was something that was going to break me down. I would not be able to do what I needed to do in other aspects of the film. A big part of me would have been relieved if the movie had gone away, but what made me the most nervous was the little part of me I could imagine looking back and going, "I should have just broken my neck and done it." >

How good a musician are you?

I can hear everything. I can write. As an actual musician, I play trumpet now but that's an instrument I started playing for this movie. I played sax growing up, I play bass, I play piano a bit, drums a bit. I've always said that if I could squirrel away enough money and know that I could deal with three years of not working, I could just shred. I have a fantasy about that. My kids are out of the house now in college and that's taken care of. I think about it a lot. Especially when I am with other musicians — there is nothing that gives me a greater pleasure. There's nothing even close to it. ❶

Not even directing a film?

Directing this film felt like a trail of tears. That was very, very difficult. My wife came out and saw me halfway through it and said, "You can't do this anymore. Not like this." There were just too many things to do. It would be interesting to not have to be in the thing and just direct it.

This month you also return as Rhodey in *Captain America: Civil War*. Was it weird taking over the character back in 2010 after he had been initiated by another actor?

No. It was weird to people in the town who didn't know anything about the story, and it looked like something different than it was — that I had moved Terrence Howard out of a seat. But that's not what happened at all. On the face of it, do you think I have the power to get someone out of a Marvel movie? He was not coming back and there was an open seat and I was asked to fill it.

How is it playing the character across the range of films?

It is cool that we can pop up in everyone's storylines. We never know when it is going to happen. You get a call and it's like, "Oh, I am in that?" Okay. Alright, I guess I'll show up."

The internet thinks you die this time around...

Well, they've got good reason to think so. Doesn't look good for Rhodey (*laughs*). He did hit the ground kind of hard!

For all their technical demands, are they fun to do?

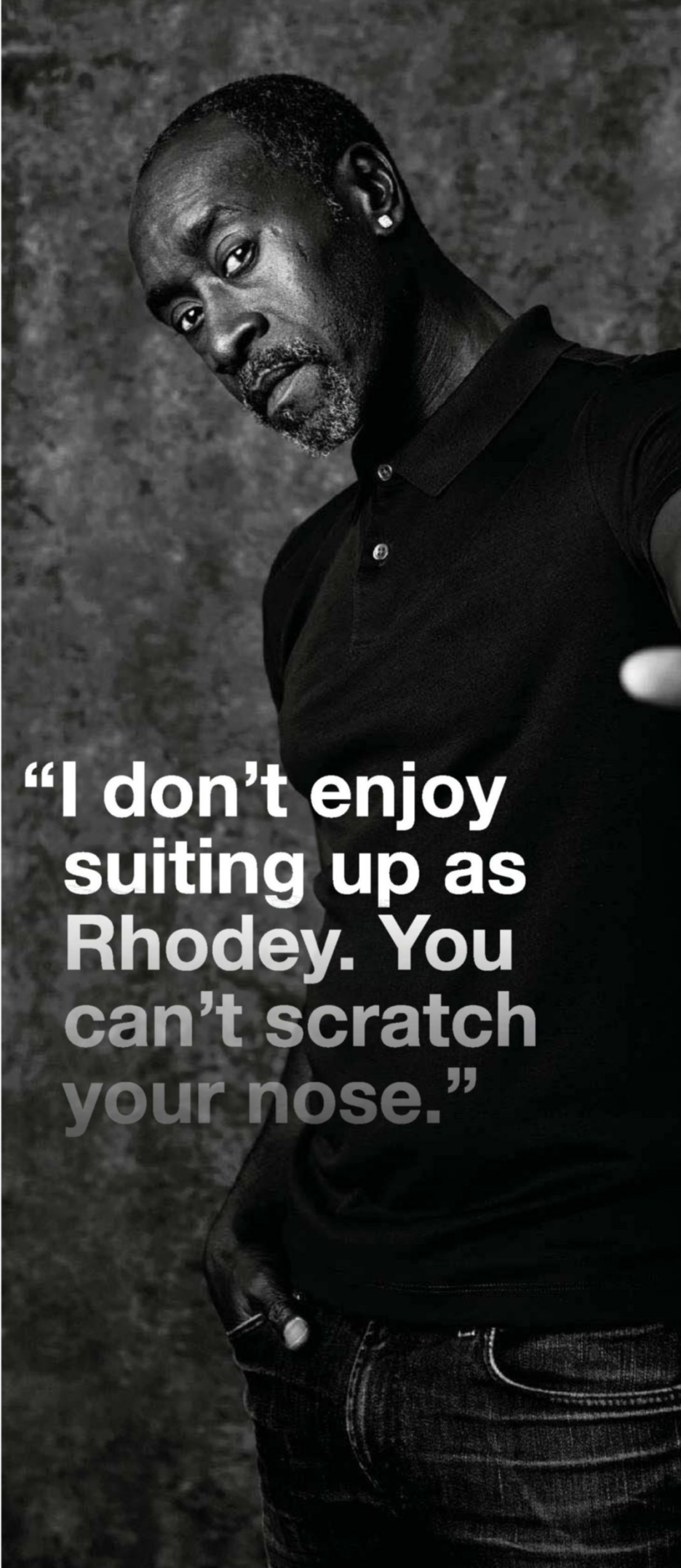
It's always fun to come back and see each other. But when you start suiting up... I don't enjoy that part of it. It's a necessary evil. It's a big, clunky restricting thing that you have on. You can't scratch your nose.

Is it heavy?

They have made it lighter and lighter since I've been more vocal about the implicit racism in Robert's [costume] being way lighter than mine. They started to panic. "Make it lighter! Make it lighter! No chains on the suit!"

Although *Miles Ahead* is your first feature-directing gig, you've been producing since *Crash*. Why was *Crash* important to you?

Paul (*Haggis, writer-director*) came to me and gave me the script. I read it and had a very visceral emotional reaction to it. I called him afterwards and I was like, "This thing is the bomb. Let's go." And then we went around to every studio in Hollywood and were told, "No." We then spent the next year hustling and trying to find money to put it together, and then slowly started going out to actors and wrangling people. It isn't hard to get actors when you have a piece of material like that, but it's a much different prospect to get financiers on board. Then we were able to find the money and the rest is history.



"I don't enjoy suiting up as Rhodey. You can't scratch your nose."

FOOTNOTES

❶ At the end of the film, Cheadle as Miles plays with genuine jazz legends including Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter. "The whole movie was worth that for me," says Cheadle.

❷ Only two Asian actors have ever won Academy Awards — Dr. Haing S. Ngor for *The Killing Fields* and Miyoshi Umeki for *Sayonara*. No openly gay man has won an acting Oscar, while only one openly gay woman has ever won (Linda Hunt, for *The Year Of Living Dangerously*).

You were not there on its Oscar-winning night. Where were you?

I was actually at Matt Damon's house. I was in New York working on a movie at the time.

Were you gutted not to be there?

No, I wasn't, because I had gone through a really funky process with the Producers Guild, where they determined who was and was not eligible for an Oscar, and it was determined that I was not. It was a rigmarole. I was happy for the film and proud of what happened. I was thankful I was in a place where I was working and not just in LA pissed off that I didn't walk on stage. Because at the end of the day, that's kind of all it was. Everybody knows I produced it. It won the Oscar. It's all good.

The following year you were nominated for Best Actor for *Hotel Rwanda*...

It's interesting. I had been sitting at the SAG Awards with some MGM executives. We didn't win any SAG Awards. I was not that concerned. When you feel like you've done the thing, whether you get the accolade or not, it doesn't diminish what you've done or elevate what you've done, and it's not going to be any better because somebody gave me a statue. But this executive said, "We better get some Oscar nominations or I am not going to spend any more money on this movie." I said, "I can hear you. I'm sitting right here." And I realised why we had to get an Oscar nomination. That's the life blood for the film. That's why the circus matters.

What's your take on the diversity debate sparked by this year's Oscars?

We know what it's about. It's about being in positions — and it's not just black people ❶ — where all the diaspora of humanity has an opportunity to tell its story and to use that platform to do it. It's still a business and it is a money-making prospect. I clearly understand it. We're not saying there has to be an egalitarian attitude to creativity. We are talking about opportunities. If there was more parity, and if there was an attempt to be inclusive, it would bear out. Those movies would make as much money. They would be deserving — which is a word I never use — of that kind of an accolade. But I don't think they are getting greenlit. No-one even wants to make them, [unless] you can figure out how to do that in an independent space. If you are talking about black screenwriters creating those stories, why would you even spend your time to create that if you knew there was no chance you were ever going to get it made? If you don't see it represented, why would you even go after it? All of those things have to be looked at. There's no one answer. It's not about getting a metal statue, at the end of the day.

Finally, it's the 15th anniversary of Basher Tarr's unforgettable Cockney accent in *Ocean's Eleven*. Are you repentant?

That's such a hard one for you guys. It's so funny. When I went to the BAFTAs one year, I went out to get something and someone would drive by and go, "Fucking Basher, I love your accent man, you're hilarious," and then another dude would drive by the other way and go, "Fuck you, don't ever fucking do that again, you piece of shit!" It kept going like that all the way back to the hotel. It was like I stole a national secret or shit on the crown jewels. ■

MILES AHEAD IS OUT ON APRIL 22 AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 50. CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR IS OUT ON APRIL 29 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN A FUTURE ISSUE.

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REVIEW



MARCH 31 – APRIL 27, 2016 | EDITED by NICK DE SEMLYEN

NEW RELEASE

STAR WARS: THE FORCE AWAKENS

The movie's makers share
the secrets of *Star Wars: The
Force Awakens*. (p. 126)

ILLUSTRATION NOMA BAR

DVD DVD BR BLU-RAY ITUNES SKY STORE SKY MOVIES NETFLIX AMAZON



Bridge Of Spies

★★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 12

DVD BR A

RUSSIAN ROULETTE



ARK WHO? IT'S total Hollywood bullshit," thundered Frank Stallone on Twitter the day after the Oscars, before adding, "Mark

Rylance couldn't even comb his hair for Christ sake." Sly's brother later apologised for his bizarrely phrased slam, and we're guessing if he ever sees *Bridge Of Spies* he'll gain a bit more respect for the man who beat his sibling to the gold. Playing Soviet spy Rudolf

Abel with a refined Scottish accent (though none other than Sting has weighed in, saying it should have been Geordie), Rylance's performance is still, subdued and saturnine. Every movement, however tiny, is deliberate. He radiates intelligence and poise. And yes, his hair is very well-combed, though there's a chance he may not have done it himself.

Every spy needs a network, and Rylance is surrounded by an astonishing alignment of talent, both behind and in front of the camera. The real-life tale originated with first-time screenwriter Matt Charman (originally it was to skip forward in hero James Donovan's life to focus on his relationship with Castro), before Joel and Ethan Coen were brought on to add some polish: the brothers were responsible, we'd imagine, for wry lines such as, "Everyone will hate me, but at least I'll lose." Tom Hanks is terrific as Donovan, the righteous lawyer whose increasingly phlegmy condition puts the "cold" in

"Frank Stallone?
Never heard of him."

Cold War. And Steven Spielberg crafts the tale with grandeur and wit, from the Spycraft 101 prologue in 1957 (the same year that Indiana Jones went after the crystal skull!) to the climactic set-piece on the Glienicke Bridge in 1961. Save a CGI-heavy sequence involving a U-2 spy plane, this is slow, sturdy, old-fashioned filmmaking, but it's never fusty.

The release's special features are, it must be said, a little snoozy. Concentrating on the historical background, four slick featurettes dig deeper into the era's mood of political hysteria ("Our nation may well die!" yells Senator Joseph McCarthy in archive footage) but fail to tell us much about the making of the film itself. There's nothing from the Coens and only a smidge of Spielberg, though we do get to see him doodling on a whiteboard and welcoming to the set his dad Arnold, who went to Russia on a foreign exchange trip in 1960 and saw the actual downed U-2. [NICK DE SEMLYEN](#)

ALSO OUT



The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 12



→ After the low-carb fun-suck of *Mockingjay — Part 1*, director Francis Lawrence gives fans a finale they can devour, which sees Katniss and co. take the fight to the Capitol. Lawrence nails every steely scowl, and Philip Seymour Hoffman's final on-screen moments are powerfully poignant. **JD**



Sisters

★★★

FROM APRIL 11 / CERT. 15



→ Comedy goddesses Tina Fey and Amy Poehler play middle-aged siblings in different kinds of crisis who throw a rip-roaring farewell bash for their childhood home. It's the most skeletal of premises, but the leads bring their A-game and rustle up some superb support as they illustrate that you're never old enough to know better. **ES**



Krampus

★★★★

FROM APRIL 11 / CERT. 15



→ There's loads of fun wrapped up in this comedy-horror about what happens to a family that stops believing in the magic of Christmas and is visited by Santa's devilish opposite. At its best it brings to mind the likes of *Gremlins* in its violent mischief, and despite the occasional flat gag, it has all the makings of a Christmas cult favourite. **OR**



The Good Dinosaur

★★★

FROM: NOW / CERT. PG



PLAY PAL



Top: "Can anyone else smell something burning?" **Above:** Boy wonder: Arlo the dinosaur's human friend, Spot.



THE GOOD DINOSAUR has an enthralling story to tell, one packed with tension, heartache and intriguing twists. The bad news? That story

is not on screen — it's behind the scenes.

But let's focus first on what is there. In a parallel universe where dinosaurs weren't wiped out, Arlo (Raymond Ochoa) is the runt of a family of farming Apatosauruses, his natural nervousness meaning he struggles to make his mark. Literally — when the members of the family prove themselves worthy, they're permitted to leave a footprint on the side of their corn silo. Disaster strikes when his father Henry (Jeffrey Wright) dies hunting a feral boy who's been eating their crops. Arlo discovers the boy, gives chase, falls into a river and is carried downstream. The bulk of the film covers his adventures and burgeoning friendship with the boy who he names

Spot. Fittingly — in this world humans have an intelligence level roughly the level of dogs.

It's all very effective, the relationships wrenching the requisite emotions from you. But it's also too familiar — the death of Henry and Arlo's journey home are both highly reminiscent of *The Lion King*, while the T-Rex family have shades of *Finding Nemo*'s shark Bruce. And they aren't the only times you're hit by Disney/Pixar déjà vu.

After hitting third-act issues, the original director Bob Peterson was replaced by Pete Sohn and the film was effectively started again. There's a fascinating tale to be told about the production trials, and four years' worth of binned footage that would benefit from an in-depth documentary. As it stands, we get the standard package of deleted scenes, happy-smiley featurettes and the (very good) short film *Sanjay's Super Team*. It all feels like a missed opportunity. Much like the film itself. **JONATHAN PILE**



Star Wars: The Force Awakens

★★★★★

FROM APRIL 18 / CERT. 12

DVD Blu-ray

A NEW HOPE



YOU'VE ALMOST certainly seen it, so let's not spend too long reiterating what is already widely held: that J. J. Abrams has

given the world the *Star Wars* sequel it craved. Safe in terms of plot, it does skirt close to being a remake, but instead emerges as warm homage, thick with nods to the original trilogy but with a spirit and humour that make the new characters as lovable as the old.

The Blu-ray set is put together in the same way. It is infectiously geeky, liberally sprinkled with the sort of trivia *Star Wars* fans swarm to like Jawas on an old landspeeder. Mark Hamill read the stage directions out at the cast run-through. Chewbacca's suit, as in the original, is knitted, like a nan's jumper. BB-8 was first drawn by Abrams on a Post-it note.

The main event is an 80-minute documentary, directed by Laurent Bouzereau, the Spielberg of behind-the-scenes docs. It's not a puff piece, as these things often are, but a proper delve into the film. Crucially, it covers the questions you have *after* watching, including proper focus on that death. The other video pieces are cute but too brief. Snippets of the read-through make you want to see the rest. Deleted scenes, unfortunately, reveal little new — no sign of that snowspeeder chase you've heard about or Constable Zuvio — although there's a thrill at Kylo Ren stepping into the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon. As a whole, like the film, the extras show that the rulers of *Star Wars* are doing things for the fans. **OLLY RICHARDS**

EMPIRE VIEWING GUIDE

EMPIRE SPOILER ALERT!

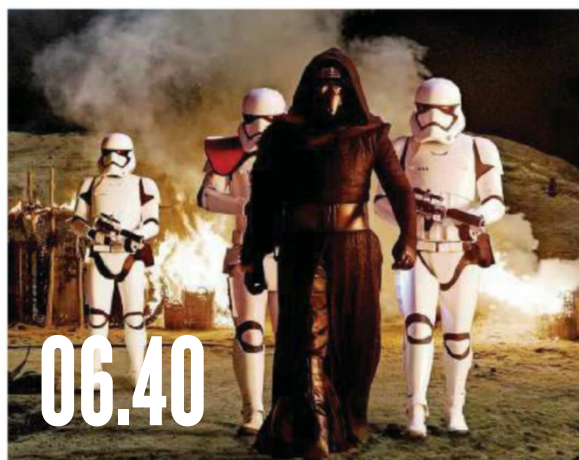
WORDS NICK DE SEMLYEN

OUR TOP PICKS FROM THE MOST ANTICIPATED FILM OF ALL TIME

01.58

Spaced

As the crawl ends, the camera pans across to a Star Destroyer in silhouette, gliding over the surface of Jakku like a shark. It's a traditional way to open the movie — all three original films begin with a Star Destroyer — but J. J. Abrams did explore other options. "There was consideration that we'd open with Luke's lightsaber flying through space," says editor Mary Jo Markey, "landing on Jakku and Maz [Kanata]'s hand pulling it out of the ground."



Meet Kylo

At various stages in development, Kylo Ren sported an elongated Vader mask, a metal hose coming out of his face, and a red oval helmet that ended up being worn by the Guavian Death Gang. "We originally called him 'the Jedi Killer' as a placeholder," says concept artist Doug Chiang. "As we learned more, we started to modify the design. At one point he was more like a pirate bounty hunter."



11.19

Sand Person

Rey lives on Jakku, a sandy junk-planet that resembles Tatooine but isn't. "It's a cold desert," explains Chiang. "We had to make sure it looked distinct, so we settled on the Atacama Desert in South America and Wadi Rum in Jordan, with its amazing mountain ranges." The fallen Star Destroyers were inspired by Indian ship-breaking yards. "We found very powerful images of huge ship hulls on beaches, being manually cut apart."



15.04

Teedo Time

On Jakku we meet two oversized creatures: the 20-foot happabore and the square-helmeted luggabeast, steed of tiny scavenger Teedo. "J.J. and I talked a lot about *War Horse*," says creature designer Neal Scanlan, who oversaw the practical monsters. "There were five puppeteers inside the happabore and two in the luggabeast. The latter was originally going to be seen hauling scrap, but J.J. liked the idea of putting this little tyrant on its back." The actor inside the Teedo suit, Kiran Shah, has played goblins in the *Hobbit* and *Harry Potter* franchises, and was an Ewok in *Return Of The Jedi*.



18.30 The Plutt Thickens

A foul-tempered junkboss with the face of a blobfish, Unkar Plutt (Simon Pegg) originally had a bigger part: scenes of him hunting for the Millennium Falcon at Maz Kanata's castle were cut. "The key word was 'repellent'," says Scanlan. "The idea was to make him large and fleshy and sweaty. He's awful, but he holds the purse strings." As for the instant-bread Plutt hands out in "portions," the four-second shot of it rising was done practically and took three months to get right. Apparently it tasted terrible.



38.33 Thumbs Up

BB-8's cutest moment is the bit where he uses a lighter-gizmo's flame to give Finn (John Boyega) a thumbs-up. "That was an idea our visual-effects editor, Marty (Allan Kloner), came up with, and J. J. was very keen to get it in," says editor Maryann Brandon. "We had a jokey mantra: 'When in doubt, cut to BB-8.' We had so much footage of him rolling and looking and turning, it was like our own personal Puppy Channel."



46.01

Wrath Of The Rathtars

"The rathtars were based on a dog's ball with all these spikes on it," says Scanlan of the nightmarish fang-beasts that escape from the Falcon's cargo hold. "It is basically an enormous stomach with one thing on its mind: to put as many things inside that stomach as it can. With *Star Wars*, simplicity is key. Like R2-D2 or BB-8, any child can draw a silhouette of a rathtar." According to the novelisation, Solo was delivering them to King Prana's private zoo, a place we'd like to see visited in a spin-off film.



54.49

It's A Maz, Maz, Maz, Maz World

The Yoda-like Maz Kanata (Lupita Nyong'o) lives on Takodana, a bustling forest planet. If it looks familiar, that's because the exteriors were shot in the Lake District and Gloucestershire. "Originally it was going to be even more exotic," says Chiang, perhaps overstating the exotic nature of Gloucestershire. "It was going to be a huge city, mixed with a rainforest. Then we found these beautiful locations in England that hadn't been seen before in *Star Wars*."



57.26

Maz's Menagerie

A nod to *A New Hope's* cantina, Maz's digs are teeming with out-there beasties. Look out for Wollivan (a pig-faced rascal played by Warwick Davis), the Hassk Triplets (werewolfesque bandits) and the Dengue Sisters (bug-critters huddled around a gambling table). "On set we called them Squitos'," says Scanlan of the latter. "They'll invite you to play a game but you'll never win. We would come up with all these ideas and present them to J. J., like an *X Factor* for aliens. We made about 110 creatures: what you see is just a splashing of flavour."

1.05.17

Force-Back

When Rey opens the case holding Luke's lightsaber, the film hurtles into a 'Force-back' sequence. "J. J. kept calling it 'Rey's acid trip,'" laughs Brandon. "Just to be clear, we did not drop acid before editing that scene!" The shots were thrashed out during a two-day meeting. "It got philosophical," says Markey. "We talked a lot about how the light side and the dark side are both revealing themselves."



1.10.04

Bomb The Base

"We thought, 'What would a Death Star look like with 30 years of extra tech?'" says Chiang of Starkiller Base, which for a while was called "the Doom Star". "Terraforming has been talked about in the scientific community for a long time, and we decided to magnify that idea." Fun facts: 1) the First Order chose to weaponise this planet because of its minerals, and 2) yes, it can move, since it has rocket ports on its far side.

**Castle Siege**

As X-wings come swooping in over the water, a beat inspired by Clint Eastwood movie *Firefox*, our heroes battle the First Order on land. "This changed an enormous amount," Markey reveals. "There was a whole encounter with Han and Finn and Maz coming up against stormtroopers. But we didn't want to leave Rey too long. And we didn't want to release a big, bloated movie."

1.15.22

Exit Music (For A Stormtrooper)

That First Order minion who gets blasted by Chewbacca's bowcaster? It's Radiohead's Nigel Godrich, making a sneaky cameo. "There are other stormtroopers to look out for," says Markey. "Daniel Craig, (composer) Michael Giacchino, who hauls Poe up to Kylo Ren in the village scene, and American comedian Ben Schwartz. Plus Kevin Smith voiced one in the castle battle." One celebrity who didn't join the ranks of evil: Jon Stewart, who refused to cameo if he couldn't be a good guy.



1.51.01

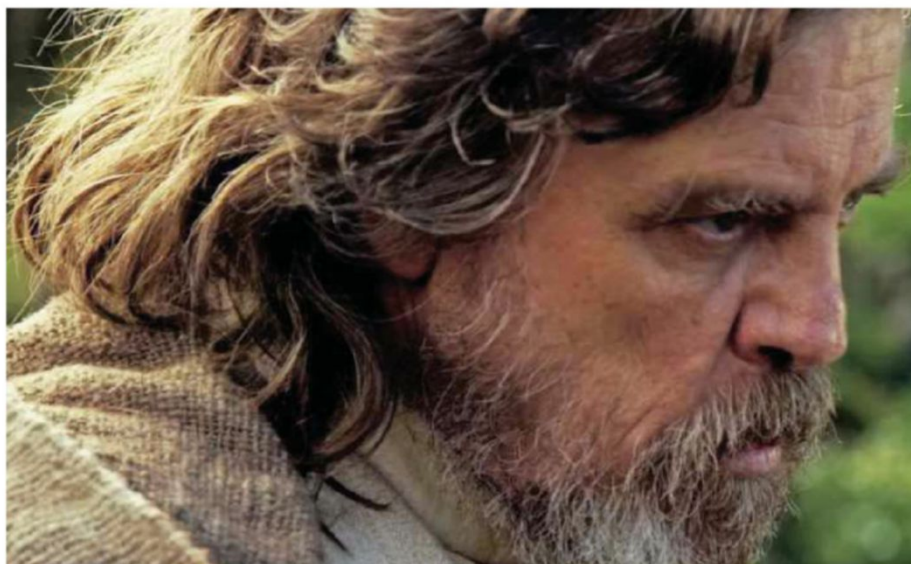
Lethal Weapon

Kylo Ren's tri-saber is powered by a cracked kyber crystal, much like *Empire's* photocopier. "I believe the design was thought up in the prop shop in London," says Chiang. "We did some exploration of proto-lightsabers. But they didn't have the same visual power."

2.01.57

Map To The Stars

Where did R2-D2 get his part of the map that leads to Luke? Markey has an out-there answer. "We planted seeds to suggest he might have it in his archive," says the co-editor. "He got it during *Episode IV*, when he plugged into the Death Star."



2.06.12

Luke Who's Not Talking

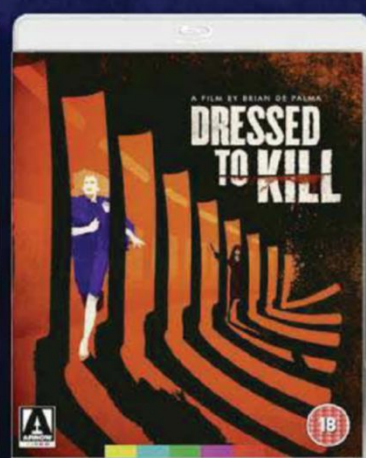
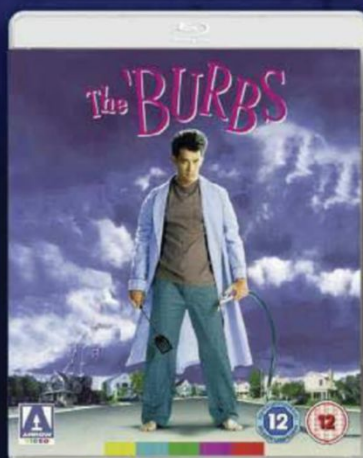
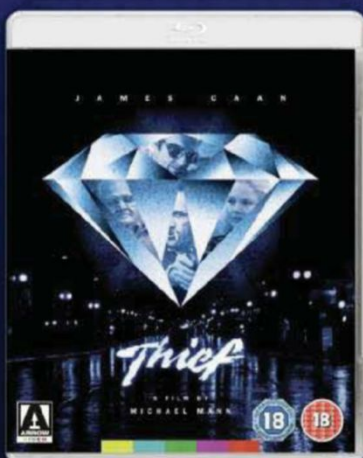
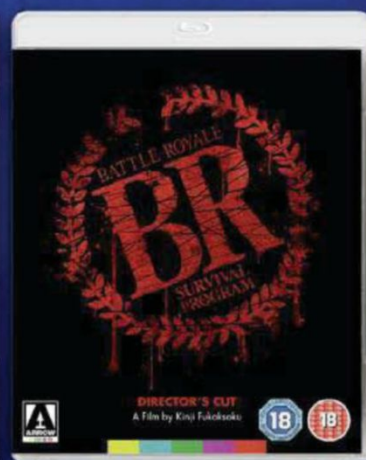
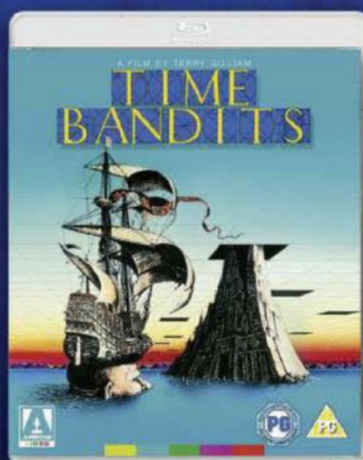
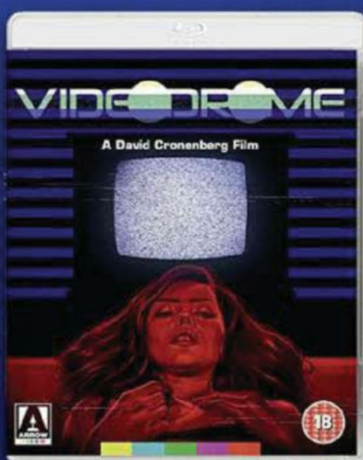
And the movie ends, with Rey holding out Luke's lightsaber to the Jedi Master himself. "We actually debated a lot about whether it should finish on that helicopter shot, or just the close-up of Luke looking at her and considering whether to reach out," Markey recalls. "But I'm really happy with J. J.'s decision." We'll have to wait until *Episode VIII* to learn more about Luke's mighty new beard.



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Fargo: Year Two



FROM APRIL 25 / CERT. 15



HAIL, HAWLEY!



OAH HAWLEY WAS not the first person to try to alchemise the Coen brothers' *Fargo* into TV gold. Just a year after that film came out in 1996,

Kathy Bates directed the pilot for a never-commissioned series of crime-solving adventures with Edie Falco (the future Carmela Soprano) taking

on Frances McDormand's role of heavily pregnant cop Marge Gunderson. It was a treatment so on-the-nose it missed the point; it even ended with Marge giving birth. The Coens craft great characters, but they never revisit them, and Marge's story was definitively complete. However, as *Hail, Caesar!* so spectacularly reminded us, all Joel and Ethan's movies exist in the same, skewed world, and while the ridiculous names change, anyone can detect the connections surging throughout their filmography.

Hawley understands that far better than the minds behind the *Falco Fargo* farrago, and that's how, over 20 episodes and counting, he's remoulded the brothers' work into some of the finest television of the past few years, winning Emmys and Globes along the way.

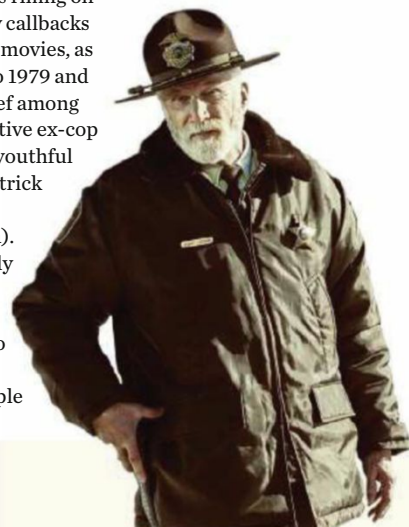
There is much film-nerdy joy to be squeezed out of Easter egg-hunting in Hawley's second "ten-hour movie" (as he defines it), which broadens his transplanting remit even further beyond the borders of Coen-Minnesota than the first. Season 2's soundtrack includes

knowing covers of *Man Of Constant Sorrow* (*O Brother, Where Art Thou?*) and Kenny Rogers' *Just Dropped In* (*The Big Lebowski*), while there are strong visual and thematic echoes of *No Country For Old Men* throughout, and of *Miller's Crossing* in Episode 7 especially, where the Gabriel Byrne/John Turturro "look in your heart" scene is virtually restaged.

But Hawley is as concerned with building his own world as he is riffing on the Coens'. There are as many callbacks to Season 1 as there are to the movies, as he shifts periods from 2006 to 1979 and revisits minor characters, chief among them Keith Carradine's reflective ex-cop Lou Solverson, in their more youthful incarnations (in Lou's case Patrick Wilson, here maximising his considerable focus and charm).

So we witness what exactly happened during the "rodeo" that was the Sioux Falls Massacre, an event referred to a few times during the last season. It begins with a multiple

Above: Patrick Wilson is young Keith Carradine (aka Lou Solverson). **Below:** Ted Danson as the unflappable Sheriff Hank Larsson.





homicide in a Waffle Hut, which, via a UFO-influenced hit-and-run involving an unhinged hairdresser (Kirsten Dunst, the season MVP), sparks a full-on gang war in which an old-school crime clan, the monstrous, squabblesome Gerhards, take on the more business-ruthless Kansas City Mafia, as personified by Bokeem Woodbine's loquacious fixer, Mike Milligan.

The threads are pulled much tighter here than the somewhat looser-fit first season. Hawley's found his pace now, and maintains a heart-pounding momentum throughout, moving the plot along briskly and steadily as it ploughs through the characters' lives, leaving an ever-increasing pile of carnage in its wake. And, speaking of those poor (though sometimes truly evil) Midwestern souls, there is a case to be made that Hawley is even better at exploring character than Joel and Ethan. Perhaps it's just the added benefit of the ten-hour narrative form, but there's a depth and sense of layered warmth to Wilson's Lou, Dunst's Peggy and even Woodbine's Milligan that

you occasionally miss amid the Coens' plotty machinations.

Not that Hawley's above such machinations himself. The most significant moment comes when Martin Freeman (aka Lester from Season 1) provides a one-off voiceover as a historian for penultimate instalment *The Castle*, by which Hawley happily exposes *Fargo's* intricate clockwork. "I like the idea that somewhere out there is a big, leather-bound book that's the history of true crime in the Midwest," the showrunner revealed last summer, before physically presenting that very book on-screen five months later in this episode. "The movie was Chapter 4, Season 1 was Chapter 9 and [Season 2] is Chapter 2." If the hints he's dropped thus far are to be believed, we'll next be skipping to Chapter 10. Exactly how this one connects up remains to be seen, but judging by Hawley's deft navigation and manipulation of the Coenverse thus far, we can be sure of one thing: we won't be meeting Marge's baby. **DAN JOLIN**

Top: Peggy (Kirsten Dunst) and Ed Blumquist (Jesse Plemons) crash out.
Above: Bokeem Woodbine's Mafia man Mike Milligan.

ALSO OUT

**Game Of Thrones: Season 5**

★★★★

FROM NOW CERT. 18



→ This fifth season is at an immediate disadvantage, being based on inferior source books. Still, the writers make smart decisions. Daenerys and Tyrion don't meet in the novels but do here, while the epic wights versus wildlings battle, mentioned but not seen in the books, is a clear series highlight. **JP**

**War & Peace**

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15



→ Director Tom Harper and writer Andrew Davies de-fustify Tolstoy, so successfully the book has become a UK bestseller for the first time. It's a demanding watch, but has vitality and style to spare. As for the huge cast, Lily James shines brightest as Natasha. Caution: features full-frontal nudity, amputations and a lengthy *mazurka*. **NDS**

**Homeland: Season 5**

★★★★

FROM APRIL 25 / CERT. TBC



→ Picking up two years after the incident in Pakistan, Homeland's fifth year is a whiplash-inducing change of pace. Relocating to Berlin, this is a slow-burn espionage mystery, involving leaked CIA documents, double agents and (surprise!) a terrorist cell. Carrie's usual off-her-meds freak-out is a yawn, but otherwise this is taut and topical. **JD**



Kim Newman's MOVIE DUNGEON

FROM MAD-SCIENCE POWERS TO HAUNTED SHOWERS...

ILLUSTRATION JOHN ROYLE

WHEN A GARAGE band play an ancient chant, demons overwhelm a small New Zealand town. Jason Lei Howden's *Deathgasm* is a surprisingly charming — if ultra-violent and ultra-loud — comedy horror. The metalhead hero (Milo Cawthorne) slowly realises his rebel friend (James Blake) is not only a poser but a demented, selfish bastard who invites possession by an arch-fiend. It features exorcism by dildo skull-penetration, but is fast and fun enough to get away with it.

Villains of a more traditional kind — sort of — drive Ryan Bellgardt's *Army Of Frankensteins*, which is wildly ambitious on limited means. Thanks to mad science — the mastermind is Dr. Tanner Finski (work out the almost-anagram) — and time travel, it's your only chance to see Karloff-look man-monsters wade gorily into Confederate troops, plus a hulking prime monster (Eric Geseus) get into the action as Booth takes aim at Lincoln.

Russian found-footage horror *Shopping Tour*, meanwhile, has an annoying kid (Timofey Yeletskiy) filming his fed-up mother (Tatyana Kolganova) on a dreary shopping trip to Finland, which sadly coincides with a festival where every Finn has to eat a foreigner. Director-writer Mikhail Brashinsky balances terror with black humour — witness squabbling mother and son bonding in order to survive while also arguing over whether their attackers are cannibals or vampires.

Women beset by supernatural forces are big at the moment. Anthony DiBlasi's *Last Shift* — which echoes the British *Let Us Prey* in interesting ways — has a police officer (Juliana Harkavy) spending a solo shift overnight in a closing-down cop shop. She is assailed not by an *Assault On Precinct 13* gang but by the ghost of a Manson-lite cult leader, who brings his followers with him. Aaron and Austin Keeling's *The House On Pine Street* is a slower-burning psychological spook story. Pregnant Emily Goss is dragged into a faded house in her dull old neighbourhood, within range of her suffocating mother (Cathy Barnett), and hates the place so much it starts hating her back. The poltergeist not only throws her around and breaks things, but convinces everyone that she's mentally ill, too.

And finally, hands-down winner of this month's wildest concept is Jaron Henrie-McCrea's *Curtain*. A haunted shower sucks curtains — and anything wrapped in curtains, including people — through a Lovecraftian netherworld to dump them in sinister woods. Danni Smith is our burnt-out hero, matched by eco-activist Tim Lueke. Yes, it's about a haunted shower... but *Curtain* does more with the premise than many films manage with sensible ideas.

"NO, THIS ISN'T
RIGHT! YOU
CAN'T GO
AROUND
SEWING
CANNONS TO
PEOPLE!"
**ARMY OF
FRANKENSTEINS**



PICKS OF THE MONTH

The Final Girls



→ Todd Strauss-Schulson's first film since *A Very Harold & Kumar 3D Christmas* stars Taissa Farmiga as Max, daughter of an '80s slasher queen (Malin Åkerman).

Embarrassed that her late mum played a dim victim ("the shy girl with a clipboard and a guitar") in her most famous movie, after a freak occurrence at a screening she finds herself transported into it as the bodycount rises. Faced with the masked killer, she's tasked with saving Mom by messing with the film's plot — which plays out in wickedly funny, often delightful ways.

Gas-s-s-s — Or — It Became Necessary To Destroy The World In Order To Save It



→ This 1970 hippie apocalypse comedy from Roger Corman offers freewheeling radicalism and good-looking dropouts cruising gorgeous deserts in cool, tricked-out vehicles. A bio-weapons mishap kills everyone over 25, and long-haired kids inherit Earth. Pacifism finally triumphs over anarchy in a unique finish, observed by a chopper-riding Edgar Allan Poe.

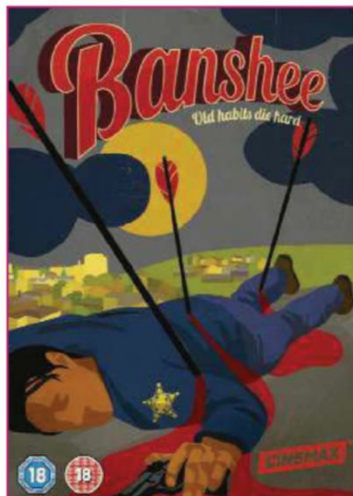
Ash Vs Evil Dead



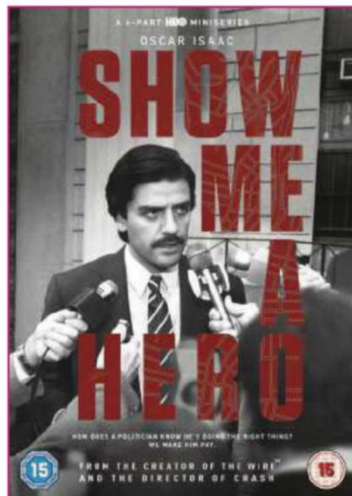
→ This fast-paced, ten-episode comedy-horror series picks up from the scurrilous original films — especially the gory slapstick of 1987's *Evil Dead 2*.

Creator Sam Raimi directs the first half-hour episode and sets the tone, while Bruce Campbell triumphantly recreates the role of luckless yet hard-to-kill bonehead Ash, still fooling around with that damn book and fighting off fiendish Deadites. A spell in a survivalist camp certainly offers the funniest victims, but it's all generally groovy.

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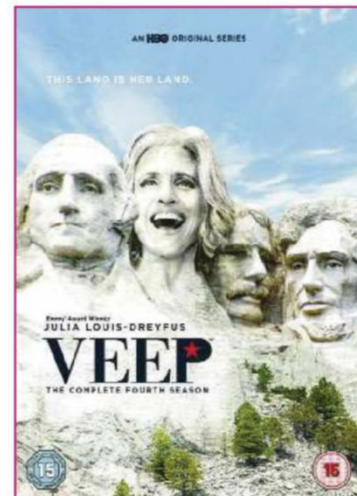
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Black Mass

★★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD Blu-ray

SMOOTH CRIMINAL



N FBI AGENT (Joel Edgerton's John Connolly) gets gangster James 'Whitey' Bulger (Johnny Depp) designated a top-

echelon informant in the Bureau's mission to eradicate Boston's Mafia. Wily Bulger, happy to get rid of the competition, thus goes from smalltime racketeering tough-nut to kingpin with a licence to kill, while Connolly is corrupted by the unholy alliance. An extraordinary wrinkle is that Bulger's kid brother Billy (Benedict Cumberbatch) is a powerful, glamorously Kennedy-esque State Senator.

There is inescapable gangster déjà vu in this sombre, chilling thriller chronicling the rise of the notorious Boston crimelord. A succession of dim bulbs get taken for one-way rides.

A vicious killer dotes on his mother. Guys blather about blood, honour, loyalty. And the lawman who's too chummy with his criminal 'opposite' isn't new. But Scott Cooper (*Crazy Heart*) is dealing, with dark, acid authenticity and a tasty cast (from Kevin Bacon's Bureau chief to Juno Temple's junkie hooker), with a story simultaneously so outrageous and so familiar it could only be true. Based on the book by *Boston Globe* investigative reporters Dick Lehr and Gerard O'Neill, it has elements that ring bells — the TV series *Brotherhood* was inspired by the Bulgers and Jack Nicholson's Costello in *The Departed* by Whitey — but is so well-crafted, it still grabs you.

Depp's creepy Whitey didn't get love this awards season, but it's his most committed performance in a long while. He's acting under prosthetics, startling blue contact lenses and thinned, grey-blond hair (one of three bonus featurettes shows Depp's transformation). But he has breathtakingly cold, Machiavellian charisma, imbuing even a dinner conversation about steak marinade with menace. Edgerton is less showily impressive, inching in slow degrees from confident ambition to spiralling despair. Although his material is less flamboyant than Depp's, it's Connolly's downfall that hits the hardest. **ANGIE ERRIGO**

Not many people know that Johnny Depp is actually nine feet tall.

ALSO OUT



Grandma

★★★★★

FROM APRIL 4 / CERT. 15

DVD

→ Lily Tomlin's first lead role in nearly 30 years makes you wonder why she's been away for so long. She plays Elle: a scatty septuagenarian and mentor to her pregnant granddaughter Sage (Julia Garner). Together, they roam the streets — and Elle's past — looking for cash for an abortion. The result is warmer and funnier than that sounds. **JNU**



The Dressmaker

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 12

DVD Blu-ray

→ Offering breathtaking bitchiness and fashion to die for, Jocelyn Moorhouse's blackest of comedies sees Kate Winslet playing it straight as a woman returning to her Aussie hometown to flaunt her success to its amusingly grotesque inhabitants. It's a likable, colourful tale, even if the wild shifts in tone mean it threatens to fall apart at the seams. **ES**



James White

★★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD

→ Josh Mond's loose, bleak New York indie offers a familiar tale — young drifter (*Girls'* Christopher Abbott) baulks at growing up — but twists it, requiring us to root for an often obnoxious lead character who's flailing in the face of crises (not least his dying mom) he can barely acknowledge. It's troubling stuff, with compelling work from Abbott. **LB**

Also out

**Sunset Song**

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ Births, marriages, deaths, war, misery, buckets of rain and Peter Mullan's beard: Terence Davies' adaptation of the classic Lewis Grassic Gibbon novel throws everything it can at its stoic heroine. Agyness Deyn impresses in the weighty lead role, and the grimness of it all is countered by dreamy visuals and a general mood of lyrical wistfulness. **NA**

**Burnt**

★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR

→ Bradley Cooper's kitchen confidential follows one man's noble quest to serve \$45 main courses to hedge fund managers. *Jerry Maguire* it ain't, but what really sinks it is the sheer, gasping unlikability of its hero, a plate-smashing diva with all the charm of a six week-old bouillabaisse. We've had *Ratatouille*. Meet Twatatouille. **PDS**

**Tangerine**

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD A

→ Sean Baker's LA story, following two transgender prostitutes on Christmas Eve, put him on the map in a major way. Technically it's a wonder — the kinetic, saturated visuals were shot on an iPhone — but it's the characters that stay with you. Also now on the map: Donut Time, the real-life location that's become a Mecca for fans. **NDS**

**The Night Before**

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD BR A

→ As the pressures of grown-up life start to force three friends apart, they decide to have one final Christmas Eve bash. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Seth Rogen and Anthony Mackie have bags of chemistry and there's scene-stealing support from Michael Shannon as a high-school pot-dealer, but the plot meanders. **HOH**

**The Green Inferno**

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 18

DVD BR A

→ There's nothing especially new in Eli Roth's fourth film, the tale of a group of do-gooders who head into the Amazon jungle to take on a logging company and end up on the menu for a village of cannibals. But the practical FX are suitably gruesome, while there are plenty of chuckles to be had from Roth's sly jabs at social justice warriors. **WT**

**The End Of The Tour**

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. TBC

DVD

→ It's an unlikely movie pitch: journalist tags along on writer's book tour. And indeed, there's nothing more eventful here than a *Broken Arrow* screening and a trip to McDonald's. But director James Ponsoldt and star Jason Segel skilfully unpack their subject, the late David Foster Wallace, showing him to be as complex as his 1,079-page masterpiece, *Infinite Jest*. **NDS**

**The Benefactor**

★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD A

→ Richard Gere gives his all as a manic philanthropist helping the daughter (Dakota Fanning) of his best friends after they die in a car crash. His over-enthusiastic, overbearing and increasingly drug-addled do-gooder is an intriguing individual, but the other characters are never fully developed, leaving him in a dramatic vacuum. **HOH**

**Hitchcock/Truffaut**

★★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 12

DVD A

→ To label this the world's greatest DVD extra is not to downplay its visual flair or rollicking pace. The 1962 chats between Alfred Hitchcock (old master) and François Truffaut (young tyro) are augmented by the thoughts of David Fincher, Martin Scorsese and others. Like the Council of Elrond for film buffs, it's a fascinating insight into two contrasting titans. **PDS**

**The Hallow**

★★★

FROM NOW / CERT. 15

DVD A

→ British director Corin Hardy's debut is a spiky statement of intent, keeping horror-hounds happy with jump-scares and gore, but exhuming terrors from fresh ground. With its creepy changelings and evil-Groot forest spirits, *The Hallow* taps into interesting elements of Irish folklore, though it's so rooted in its cabin-under-siege influences, it feels a tad derivative. **DJ**



ADVENTURES IN STREAMING

EACH ISSUE, OUR INTREPID WRITER FOLLOWS NETFLIX'S COMPUTER-CALIBRATED RECOMMENDATIONS, GOING WHEREVER THE TRAIL LEADS

WORDS SIMON CROOK

Alien invasions

IT'S A QUESTION THAT'S baffled mankind's greatest brains: are we alone in the universe? Well, Hollywood has an answer to that, which it's repeated endlessly since the 1950s. No, we're not, and here are the special effects to prove it. This year alone, we'll be gatecrashed by *The Fifth Wave*, *Terminus*, *The Blob* and, pending an Apple update, *Independence Day: Resurgence*. Offering an A to Z of planet-trashing ETs, Netflix is chest-bursting with the buggers.

First up, *Invasion Of The Body Snatchers*. Made in 1978, when the toxic haze of Watergate was still thick, Philip Kaufman's horror reflects the era's pervasive paranoia, but its vision of soulless conformity still leaves a biting chill in the 21st century. Infected by a cosmic fungus, humanity's cloned into emotionless, blank-eyed Pod People. Ever been on the Northern Line at 9am on a Monday morning? Same difference. The man-faced dog and Donald Sutherland's climactic, blood-freezing scream are well-known, but for me, its creepiest image is Brooke Adams' body deflating like a punctured tyre as her twin rises in the background. Dutch angles and mirror-imagery enhance the doppelgänger unease. This is the rarest of beasts: a remake that topples the original.

As a special bonus, the Netflix algorithms appear to be jammed on Other Remakes Of 1950s Flicks I Might Like. *Invaders From Mars*, an '80s oddity from '80s oddbods Cannon Pictures, follows a panicky kid as he alerts suburbia to a Martian invasion. Hunter Carson stars alongside Karen Black, his real-life mum. Combining the talents behind *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *Alien* (Tobe Hooper directs from a Dan O'Bannon script), you expect events to lurch into gooey horror but, weirdly, it plays as a schlocky children's movie. Wilfully blinded by nostalgia, it's amazingly faithful to its source-movie, offering little new other than Stan Winston's creature FX. His globular Martians look like Pac-Men sculpted out of meat. The invasion's eventually defeated by some good old gratuitous machine-gunning.

The invasion-nostalgia continues in *Men In Black 3*. Freshening up the formula with a time-travel plot and a menagerie of retro ETs (all

bug-eyes and exposed cauliflower brains), the third in the series sends Will Smith back to the '60s to prevent his partner's death. Enter Josh Brolin, nailing a fantastically crumpled impression of a young Tommy Lee Jones, and Jermaine Clement gnashing ham as its Boglodite villain. *Men In Black's* sarcastic take on alien-invasions (they're already here, provided they go through customs) is inherently funny, but the films, enjoyable though they are, feel naggingly inconsequential. I swear Barry

Sonnenfeld hides a neuralyzer flash in the credit crawl — you forget *Men In Black 3* the moment it ends, vaguely aware of having had a good time.

Next up, *Killer Klowns From Outer Space*, a prototype of the title-first-script-later trend that birthed the *Sharknados* of this world. It's bad-on-purpose but surprisingly good fun. Arriving in a Big Top UFO, said Klowns, presumably from a planet shaped like a big red nose, set about turning humans into candyfloss cocoons, sucking out the blood with Krazy Straws. Crikey. Remember Krazy Straws? The fear of clowns, by the way, is coulrophobia. You might want to avoid the Chiodo brothers' movie if you also suffer from campophobia, but the world they create is consistently tongue-in-cheek and perversely inventive: shadow-puppet T-Rexes, balloon-animal Dobermans, custard-pie massacres, even intestinal ventriloquism. It's like gatecrashing a kids' party hosted by Freddy Krueger.

Set ten years after the invasion, *Monsters: Dark Continent* is an attempt to expand the universe created by Gareth Evans — a promising concept shrunk by its own confused vision. We're in the Middle East now, where Marines are battling aliens and insurgents. "Who are the *real* monsters?" the movie asks. "Where are the real monsters?" you shout back as its squidzillas are relegated to a back-projection cameo. It's five per cent sci-fi, 95 per cent combat character-study à la *Hurt Locker*, but its squaddies are as sludgily drawn as the brown-hued cinematography. Whatever tantalising ideas it does have (a pitbull-versus-alien dogfight, a benign herd of equine mutations) are lost to shouty war-is-hell nihilism. With nobody to connect to, it's more like an alienation-invasion. The film's final shot is an unholy scream of despair. After two frustrating hours of hollow macho grunting, it's impossible not to join in.



NEW TO STREAMING

House Of Cards: Season 4

★★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT. 18

TV

DEVIL'S DUE



WHEN YOUR CLOSET contains as many skeletons as that of Frank Underwood, eventually it's going to be difficult to keep the door closed.

Over three seasons of Netflix's flagship drama, *Underwood* (Kevin Spacey) has betrayed, bullied and killed to reach, and remain in, the most powerful office in the world. In Season 4, his past refuses to remain locked up and revenge comes calling, many times over.

Last year the plot flowed like cold treacle, but here it surges. *Underwood* is brought low by an old enemy most of us had forgotten about; as he falls, Claire (Robin Wright), who walked out on him in last season's final seconds, rises up. She's shed the last vestiges of humanity and ramped up her ruthless ambitions. It's a treat to watch Wright match Spacey's snarling wickedness with her own cooler cruelty.



It's Claire's villainy to which we're now completely drawn.

The show has also now found a worthy foe for *Underwood*, after the sparkless billionaire Raymond Tusk and the cartoonish Russian president. Played by Joel Kinnaman, Republican Presidential hopeful Will Conway seems everything *Underwood* is not: young, handsome, modern, outwardly likable. This being *House Of Cards*, we of course discover the murkier parts of his soul, and the show enjoys the contrasts between the two men. In one of the season's stand-out scenes, Frank nails their biggest difference: while *Underwood* craves the power to be had behind closed doors, Conway needs the public fame.

Sleeping with the enemy: Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) with wife Claire (Robin Wright).

There's much promise for that to develop over the next season.

There are developments that in isolation sound utterly ridiculous — although looking at current US politics it may be argued that utter ridiculousness is the new normal — but one of this show's great strengths is in getting to absurd places in logical ways. Through stellar performances and writing that lays proper foundations for the twists rather than rushing into them, it makes sense of pantomime plots. By the end of Season 4, the depth of Frank and Claire's immorality is completely off the scale, but believable. They still make being bad so very good to watch. **OLLY RICHARDS**

ALSO STREAMING



HONEY, I SHRUNK THE KIDS

A

There's no sign of Rick Moranis in the new *Ghostbusters* reboot (he declined a cameo role), but Moranisheads can still get their fix by revisiting his miniaturisation mega-hit instead.

FROM APRIL 8



EDEN

N

If you're looking for a movie about the clubbing scene, this French epic can't be beat. It follows a young DJ, Paul (Félix de Givry), across two decades, taking in a Daft Punk cameo and a crateload of classic tunes.

FROM APRIL 25



THE OVERNIGHT

SM

Somehow, the sight of Jason Schwartzman sporting an enormous prosthetic penis isn't even the funniest thing in this film. It's a romcom with gonzo tendencies, as a couple accidentally find themselves swinging.

FROM APRIL 29



UNBREAKABLE KIMMY SCHMIDT: SEASON 2

N

Tina Fey's cult-survivor series continues. Fey says this season will feature "some pretty heavy life stuff"; hopefully it'll have more Hulk Hogan jokes, too.

FROM APRIL 15



DEATHGASM

A

As featured in Kim Newman's *Dungeon* column, this silly New Zealand horror pits a rocker against the forces of darkness. Caution for the sensitive: contains exorcism by dildo skull-penetration.

FROM APRIL 29



JURASSIC WORLD

SM

Who'd win in a fight: *Jurassic World's* raptors or *The Force Awakens'* rathars? Try to puzzle it out while rewatching Colin Trevorrow's mega-hit dino-reboot, a movie heaving with prehistoric brawn.

FROM APRIL 1



OUTLANDER: SEASON 2

A

The sexually explicit, time-travelling, kilt-heavy saga (and there aren't many of those) returns with an even steamier sophomore year. This time Jamie and Claire are headed to Paris.

FROM APRIL 10



The Criterion Collection

1928-1982 / FROM APRIL 18 / CERT. U-15

BR

Grey Gardens ★★★★★
It Happened One Night ★★★★★
Macbeth ★★★★★
Only Angels Have Wings ★★★★★
Speedy ★★★★★
Tootsie ★★★★★

CLASSIC-FILM KINGS LAUNCH IN UK



IN THE CRITERION website, between new releases, essays on Ozu and arthouse chatter can be found a mission statement.

They are not selling old movies; they're releasing the "defining moments of cinema for a wider and wider audience". Criterion's 809-strong collection, from *Amacord* to *Zatoichi*, is arguably the most valuable cross-section of cinematic history in stylishly branded slipcases anywhere — an exhaustive record of what film has achieved.

Well, good news, people. Formerly the preserve of Americans and Region 1 collectors, Criterion has widened its audience to include us. And its devotion to sumptuous special editions remains undimmed. Each Criterion release is its own velvet pocket of movie history. These guys invented the commentary (*King Kong* LaserDisc circa 1984), religiously curate layers of insight to expand our experience of the film, and take joy in knowing stuff.

Take the six titles chosen to spearhead the UK invasion: but a *souppçon* of the sheer depth and variety in the Criterion vault.

Roman Polanski's blood-bolstered



Macbeth (1971) comes awash in fell beauty — a squelchy Wales makes a tormented Scottish heath, where the hags are like primeval bag ladies. It is not only Jon Finch's glowering Thane of Cawdor falling apart; the entire world has gone mad. Consider that this was Polanski's first film after the murder of Sharon Tate, and the leering slaughter of Lady Macduff and her children becomes chillingly resonant. Two documentaries offer priceless input from Polanski and a striking note from an extra, pointing out that he is slain by a soldier made-up to look just like Charles Manson.

Frank Capra's *It Happened One*

Left: Another close shave for Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie*. **Above, from top to bottom:** Harold Lloyd and Ann Christy in *Speedy*, Lloyd's last silent film; Macduff (Terence Bayler) and Macbeth (Jon Finch) settle scores; *It Happened One Night* for Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert.

Night (1934), as silky as a negligee, set the blueprint for every romcom, as spoilt Claudette Colbert hoofs it across Depression-stung America with snappy reporter Clark Gable. She's headed to a lame society marriage; he's onto the story of a lifetime. True love is about 50 Oscar-winning wisecracks away. After which you can enjoy a feature-length, Ron Howard-narrated documentary on Capra.

Speedy (1928) is one of Harold Lloyd's final escapades. He may have played third fiddle to Chaplin and Keaton, but he was the cheery one, and this comedy about a bumbling New Yorker trying to save the city's last horse-and-cart man is unstoppably thrilling. Then relax with a selection of Lloyd's home movies, narrated by his granddaughter.

Changing tack for a documentary, *Grey Gardens* (1975) is the absorbing account of the Beales, mother and daughter and former belles of New York society, left to decay like Miss Havisham in their decrepit Hamptons mansion. The illusions weaved, power games won and lost and resolute spirit revealed become a magnificent record of the splendour of human life. The sequel, *The Beales Of Grey Gardens* (2006), comes as a bonus feature.

In spirited South American-set flying mailman drama *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939), Howard Hawks finds a halfway house between the twin poles of his famed versatility: hard-talking machismo (*à la* The Big Sleep) and fast talkin' dame comedies (*à la* His Girl Friday). Using charmingly dated model-work, Cary Grant is the daredevil pilot pushing his limits to prevent his airmail company from folding, while dealing with the advances of Jean Arthur's chorus girl. Among the copious extras are captivating excerpts from a 1972 chat between Peter Bogdanovich and Hawks himself.

Finally, there is *Tootsie* (1982), Sydney Pollack's comic masterpiece about an unemployable jerk who becomes a soap star in the guise of a woman. The script, barbarously witty and brilliantly structured, is worthy of Billy Wilder. "I knew that the idea of Dustin Hoffman as a woman would be irresistible," quips screenwriter Larry Gelbart on the 2007 documentary. "Although, he would be resistible as a woman." Elsewhere, with a perceptive comment typical of these releases, Hoffman insists this is not a film about a man becoming a woman; it's a film about a man becoming a man. Criterion, it's been worth the wait. **IAN NATHAN**

ALSO OUT



Eureka

★★★

1983 / FROM NOW / CERT. 18

DVD BR

→ This minor Nicolas Roeg film often gets forgotten amidst his better-known masterworks. It has its flaws, with the story — a prospector (Gene Hackman) gets rich then fears for his moolah — occasionally secondary to the virtuoso filmmaking. But it's worth a look, if only for the succulent support from bad guys Joe Pesci and Mickey Rourke. **AS**



Re-Animator

★★★★★

1985 / FROM NOW / CERT. 18

BR

→ For his take on H. P. Lovecraft's short story, Stuart Gordon eschewed the author's existential cosmic dread, instead upping the gore. Jeffrey Combs excels as Herbert West, a mad scientist who resurrects the dead, not that they're happy about it. Gordon adroitly handles the schlock and awe, the result still one of the great horror-comedies. **CH**



The Bitter Tears Of Petra Von Kant

★★★★★

1972 / FROM APRIL 4 / CERT. 12

BR

→ Before his Scorsese years, DP Michael Ballhaus helped elevate Rainer Werner Fassbinder's one-set play into a louche fantasia of colour and stifled emotion, as Margit Carstensen's Petra is caught between her Lynn Benfield-like servant and a young model. Loungecore has never been so elegant. **PDS**

“This is a cyclical journey, bathed in heartache.”

The Life And Death Of Colonel Blimp

OUT NOW / CERT. U



MAN O' WAR



W INSTON CHURCHILL'S SECRET MEMO was handwritten. And he was livid: “Pray propose to me the measures necessary to stop this foolish production.” To be fair, with World War II in the balance, the leader of the free world had a lot on his mind in August 1942.

The last thing he needed was a pair of upstart filmmakers proposing some satire detrimental to the morale of his British army. To his mind, *The Life And Death Of Colonel Blimp* was a matter of life and death. Democracy being democracy, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (hence forward P&P) carried on, using borrowed military uniforms and vehicles.

Created by cartoonist David Low for the *Evening Standard*, *Blimp* was a slap-headed blowhard with a moustache the size of a coat hanger and the temperament of a blunderbuss. Stephen Fry's General Melchett in *Blackadder Goes Forth* is pure Blimper. Out of earshot, Churchill was widely considered an inspiration.

What the PM missed was that rather than simply amplify the joke, P&P (Powell directing, Pressburger writing and producing; the joins rarely showing) were creating a British *Citizen Kane*, a stirring attempt to encompass a nation within a single figure.

Not unlike *Kane*, their film is constructed as a series of flashbacks, here more like three movements in a grand symphony. We begin with the cliché of Blimp: Major-General Clive Wynne-Candy (Roger Livesey) in his corpulent dotage, shining dome of the Home Guard, captured at his Turkish baths in London, unperturbed by World War II. He's been outwitted before a training exercise (irony ahoy: Candy may be a military man to his boots, but we only see him partake in mock versions of warfare).

1 Young Candy (Roger Livesey) takes tea with Edith Hunter (Deborah Kerr) in Berlin. Shortly after, he will find himself duelling...

2 The now ageing Candy is surprised in his Turkish bath mid-World War II.

3 In the early Berlin section, Theo (Anton Walbrook) and Candy toast the former's engagement to Edith. Quiet heartbreak will follow.



WORDS
IAN NATHAN

“But war starts at MIDNIGHT!” bellows the old-timer, unaware that fair play no longer applies. Being glacially slow on the uptake is one of Candy's defining characteristics. In a memorable flourish, he dives into the pool to re-emerge 40 years younger, full head of hair, a Second Boer War hero. So begins the strange saga of his life and (spiritual) death.

Genius was defined by F. Scott Fitzgerald as the ability to hold two opposed ideas at the same time, and *Blimp* is both farcical and forlorn, heroic and daft, pompous and deeply felt. Dash it all, P&P are attempting to decode what it is to be English. Utilising gloriously dressed soundstages and nearby locations, Candy blunders from turn-of-the-century Berlin to London, then to the muddy furrows of France as World War I winds down. Then forward again to England and World War II, before being re-deposited in the same Turkish baths. It is a cyclical journey, bathed in heartache.

In the early Berlin section, as a matter of priggish honour, Candy duels (more war games) with his German equivalent, the dashing Theo (Anton Walbrook). The 'tache, we discover, is only there to conceal a duelling scar. The film never doing what it is supposed to, we depart the contest just as it gets going, and rather than sworn enemies, Candy and Theo emerge lifelong friends.

As the camera sails aloft and out through a skylight to descend upon a Berlin street as pristine as a Christmas cake, you have both an illustration of the film's ironies (history is always out of frame) and one of British cinema's greatest shots. The film is a technical marvel. Here began P&P's love affair with Technicolor. Here are shots to make even Martin Scorsese (who championed its 1985 restoration) weak at the knees, not just for their ingenuity, but how they enlarge the film's ideas. A montage of hunting trophies on Candy's wall ends with a jolt at a German helmet, heralding World War I (war and hunting being much the same to our hero).

The trumpet-brash Livesey had replaced Laurence Olivier, who became suspiciously detained by the Air Fleet Arm at the 11th hour. He now feels irreplaceable. Debonair and hilariously sneaky, Candy is anything but straightforward. Livesey plays sublime cadences of almost-reflection, tiny echoes of a great sadness that might consume him if he dared admit it was there.

Of the view a few metaphysics never hurt anyone, P&P cast Deborah Kerr, only 21, as three separate incarnations of the same woman. Edith/Barbara/Angela is Candy's Rosebud, the ideal he chases throughout his life. But happiness eludes him. Candy is so busy doing the right thing, he never feels the right thing.

In contrast to the carry on of the English, we have a reflective Germany. Or, at least, Theo's lost Germany — P&P are at pains to emphasise he is a German, not a Nazi. “This is not a gentleman's war,” Theo insists of World War II. He has lost all, but learned everything. Candy has barely caught glimmers. Dependable and brave as Blimp might be, P&P are hardly advocating a return to the notion of wars fought with a public-school rulebook. By the end, Candy sadly acknowledges he has no part in Churchill's plans, but he still salutes the new guard as they march past.

WORDS SIMON CROOK

THE MONTH'S BIGGEST RE-RELEASES

Archive

Stone Cold1991
★★★FROM APRIL 18
CERT. 15
BR

→ Crapnificent action bullshit. An Easter Island statue carved in denim, Brian 'The Bos' Bosworth infiltrates a biker gang led by Lance Henriksen. It flopped in 1991, but an upgrade's overdue. Watching *Stone Cold* is like inhaling Lynx Uzi: an almighty belch of fuming machismo and preposterous violence. Truly bad movies are boring: this is geni-arse. Cry "Logic's for pussies!" and dive in.

Dragnet1987
★★★FROM NOW
CERT. PG
DVD

→ There's never been a better showcase for Dan Aykroyd's rat-a-tat motormouth than this curio. Sporting a buzz cut and a bad suit as stick-up-his-arse cop Joe Friday, he spends 80 minutes busting balls, often those of partner Pep Streebek (Tom Hanks). It's hugely silly — there are goat-headed cultists, a giant snake and a rap at the end — but big fun.

Three Days Of The Condor1975
★★★★FROM APRIL 11
CERT. 15
DVD BR

→ A CIA within the CIA: that's the conspiracy facing Robert Redford's fugitive analyst, alone and hunted in icy New York. As taut as Redford's unyielding salon hair, Sydney Pollack's thriller is a response to post-Watergate paranoia that jitters from the black thrill of confusion. Redford's tremendous; likewise a chilling Max von Sydow as his urbane nemesis.

Ghoulies1984
★★FROM APRIL 11
CERT. 15
BR

→ Meet the Ghoulies, a demonic *Muppet Show* summoned by Peter Liapis' Satanist. With acting as rubbery as the FX, this slab of '80s horror cheese features zero scares, many laughs and a devil doll that looks like a pug had sex with a petit pois. Plus cinema's worst breakdancing scene. Or maybe the guy just wiped his arse with a wasp. Who knows? Enjoy!

Compulsion1959
★★★★FROM NOW
CERT. 12
BR

→ Two law students concoct the perfect murder, only to face death when they wind up in court. Based on the case of Leopold and Loeb, the inspiration for Hitchcock's *Rope*, Richard Fleischer's true-crimer exerts the grim grip of a hangman's noose. It's powered by Dean Stockwell's callow sadist and Orson Welles' attorney, who thunders an anti-death-penalty speech of devastating power.

The City Of Lost Children1995
★★★★★FROM NOW
CERT. 15
DVD BR

→ Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Marc Caro mutated into the steampunk Brothers Grimm for this sci-fi fairy tale in which a scientist gobbles infants' dreams for fun. There are laughs from its Tex Avery anarchy, but it harpoons the senses with fantastical visuals. Press pause at any moment and you'll get an indelible image, from flea assassins to monocled cyborgs.

Andrei Rublev1966
★★★★★FROM APRIL 25
CERT. 15
BR

→ Split into eight chapters, Tarkovsky's mesmerising portrait of iconic artist Andrei Rublev roams through a medieval Russia of exquisite, brutal cruelty: a monochrome mirror of the Soviet state where Tarkovsky honed his craft. Its core theme, of how art responds to repression, is obvious, but each unforgettable episode is itself an enigma, and demands (and rewards) with each viewing.

Kikujiro1999
★★★FROM NOW
CERT. 12
BR

→ Grumpy old git and latchkey kid search for the latter's mum in an eerily empty Japan. Famed for his yakuza flicks, 'Beat' Takeshi Kitano blindsided everyone with this gorgeously spacey film, a go-nowhere road-movie populated with jugglers, robo-men and hairy bikers. Akin to watching *The Wizard Of Oz* on Valium, it nonetheless has a warmly sombre tone all its own.

Michael Collins1996
★★★★FROM NOW
CERT. 15
BR

→ Biopics aren't history books. This film might take liberties with the facts, but what Neil Jordan captures, quite brilliantly, is the indignant essence of Michael Collins. Liam Neeson is riveting as the Irish revolutionary whose fight for freedom is staged not as pat celebration but as fierce tragedy. Never losing its focus, it's an astonishingly propulsive saga, fuelled by righteous fury.

Cult Cinema: An Arrow Video Companion

★★★★★

AUTHORS VARIOUS / OUT NOW

ROUGH DIAMONDS

URING HIS introduction to this compendium of essays, Ben Wheatley reminisces about renting *Taxi Driver* on VHS at the age of 15.

"By the end of the film," he says, "I felt like I'd had my head scraped out and reset." That is a solid description of the effect any of the movies mentioned in this book will have on the average viewer. A celebration of "cinematic sleaze droplets" (to borrow a phrase from Robin Bougie's contribution), the entries collected here revel in celluloid's seamier side. If it's got misshapen stars, poo-eating hookers or a scene in which a man eats a cat's eyeball — an actual thing that happens in 1934's *Maniac* — chances are it'll get a mention.

UK-based distributor Arrow has become known for its high-gloss re-releases of neglected movies, from Joe Dante's *The 'Burbs* to Richard Elfman's *Forbidden Zone*. This means they're uniquely well-placed to provide an education in cult cinema. Avid collectors, beware: 20 of the 30 chapters in this book are re-prints of booklets packaged with individual DVD/Blu-ray releases. But for the layperson (i.e. anyone unable to identify which Tinto Brass movie features a priest sniffing a lady's bicycle seat), this is a terrific



Rick Ducommun and Tom Hanks make an unwelcome find — a human femur — in *The 'Burbs*.

primer for all things out-there. Highlights include a thorough profile of Japanese director Seijun Suzuki, the man responsible for *Detective Bureau 2-3: Go To Hell Bastards!*; an examination of the avant-garde camerawork in Roger Corman's *The Fall Of The House Of Usher*; and a paean to Dario Argento's *Deep Red* by Alan Jones, who breathlessly concludes that it's "a pulse-pounding descent into a baroque vortex of madness".

Some pieces are better written than others, and there are occasional stodgy stretches. But the various authors' enthusiasm for and deep knowledge of their subjects shines through. Keep a pad and pen nearby when you're reading — chances are you'll want to scribble down titles to hunt down as you go. Good luck finding food-horror *It Came From The Fridge* (2004), though. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**



ALSO OUT

The Art Of Zootropolis

★★★★★

AUTHOR JESSICA JULIUS / OUT MARCH 8

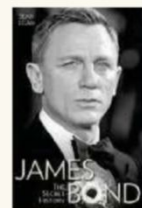


→ Disney's concept-art books are rarely less than an embarrassment of riches, and this immaculately assembled effort is no exception. Over a four-year genesis, we see *Zootropolis* evolve from a 1960s spy caper to a fully realised mammalian city, a "meticulously designed chaos", accommodating mice and giraffes alike. The team's attention-to-detail — researching different types of fur took the best part of a year — is astonishing; the artwork a sumptuous, radiant treat. **JNU**

James Bond: The Secret History

★★★

AUTHOR SEAN EGAN / OUT NOW



→ Do we really need another 007 book? Not if this trudge through the history of Ian Fleming and Eon's spy is anything to go by. New interviews with Roger Moore and Martin Campbell add much-needed weight, but some spurious claims (by what metric can it be claimed *GoldenEye* 007 is "the most successful video game of all time"?) mark this as a lesser authority on Bond. **JP**

Scenes Of Anomalisa

★★★

AUTHORS CHARLIE KAUFMAN & DUKE JOHNSON / OUT NOW



→ A glossy coffee-table book dedicated to Charlie Kaufman's brain-twistingly brilliant puppet drama is a tantalising prospect. Unfortunately, the execution is unspectacular. You get an introduction from the movie's perky bellhop, a nicely Kaufman-y touch, but otherwise it's just big stills and behind-the-scenes pics (all uncaptioned), plus a few storyboards and the script. Which doesn't include the movie's final scene: an unusual, unexplained anomaly. **NDS**

FURTHER READING



Nightmare USA: The Untold Story Of The Exploitation Independents (Stephen Thrower) Delves deep into '70s and '80s horror pulp, from *I Drink Your Blood* to *The Headless Eyes*.



How I Made A Hundred Movies In Hollywood And Never Lost A Dime (Roger Corman and Jim Jerome) B-movie king Corman elucidates on his extraordinary, crab-monster-filled career.



The Psychotronic Encyclopedia Of Film (Michael Weldon) The collected writings of Weldon, the Pauline Kael of bizarro movies. Comes with a warning that reading it may endanger your sanity.



1 Beautiful Lie

Hans Zimmer: This is really Lex Luthor. I just thought it was fun to write with harpsichords and fiddles in a bad version of Purcell. I just wanted him to stick out of the score like a sore thumb.

2 Their War Here

Junkie XL: Without any spoiler alerts, we are more or less thrown back to the end of the *Man Of Steel* movie. We see what's happened in Metropolis through the eyes of Bruce Wayne. We did some drum sessions with these amazing drummers we used on *Man Of Steel*.

3 The Red Capes Are Coming

HZ: I love my weird instruments, like the harpsichord. I can't help it. I was looking at Luthor and his quirkiness. For me, he is super-compelling.

4 Day Of The Dead

HZ: This is really reminding us *who* Superman is. It's very much the *sound* of the previous movie including my incredibly dodgy piano playing on my humble upright piano. It's the opposite to what Bruce Wayne would have. It's an honest tune.

5 Must There Be A Superman

JXL: One of my personal favourites. It's defining what Superman is for humanity. It's a really emotional piece.

Above: Clash of the titans: Superman (Henry Cavill) and Batman (Ben Affleck) go head-to-head. Below: Composers Hans Zimmer and Junkie XL, side by side.



6 New Rules

7 Do You Bleed?

JXL: I was working on the Batman-Superman fight. There are some relentless, really crazy sounds.

8 Problems Up Here

9 Black And Blue

10 Tuesday

11 Is She With You?

HZ: There were endless discussions between Junkie and myself about what the music for Wonder Woman should be like, and endless permutations of this track. Should it be a banshee cry? I suddenly remembered this brilliant electric cellist called Tina Guo. She's very softly spoken, but she wields her electric cello like a sword. I really wanted it to be a woman *playing* that line. It was important to me that it wouldn't be a testosterone energy.

12 This Is My World

13 Men Are Still Good (The Batman Suite)

HZ: It's a very minimalist idea, showing a character's duality with a minimum of notes. The whole thing is just two chords which couldn't be further apart from each other. It defies a lot of the rules of music. I think these characters defy all the rules.

EMPIRE PLAYLIST



Singalongs

- 1 Bohemian Rhapsody
Queen *Wayne's World*
- 2 Tiny Dancer Elton John
Almost Famous
- 3 Wise Up Aimee Mann
Magnolia
- 4 I Say A Little Prayer
Dionne Warwick
My Best Friend's Wedding
- 5 Sweet Caroline Neil
Diamond *Beautiful Girls*
- 6 Hold On Wilson Phillips
Harold & Kumar Get
The Munchies
- 7 My Sharona The Knack
Reality Bites
- 8 The Age Of Aquarius
The 5th Dimension
The 40 Year-Old Virgin
- 9 Respect Aretha Franklin
Mystic Pizza
- 10 You've Lost That Lovin'
Feelin' The Righteous
Brother *Top Gun*
- 11 Sweet Child O' Mine
Guns N' Roses
Step Brothers
- 12 Shout The Isley Brothers
Animal House

TO LISTEN TO THE
ABOVE, SEARCH 'EMPIRE
MAGAZINE' ON SPOTIFY.



Perennial favourite
Ryu (right) executes
his signature karaoke
move alongside
Spanish cage-
fighting ninja Vega.
Below: Yoga master
Dhalsim now sports
a fetching beard.

Street Fighter V

★★★★★

OUT NOW / PC, PS4

STILL A KNOCKOUT

THE *STREET Fighter* franchise has long been pulling in the punters time after time while staying largely true to the formula that made it famous. It's been nearly three decades since the series' 1987 debut, and while a radical reinvention is neither wanted nor needed, even *Street Fighter* needs to keep up with the times. Happily, creator Yoshinori Ono has struck a convincing balance with *Street Fighter V*. The classic 2D beat-'em-up action remains — albeit powered by a stunning 3D engine — and familiar bruisers like Ken, Ryu, Chun-Li and M. Bison are present and correct. The brawling, however, has evolved just enough to feel like a whole new game.

Ono has tinkered with the control system, adding a new layer of daunting techniques to get your head around



in the form of the V-System, which consists of three main elements: V-Skill, V-Trigger and V-Reversal. It sounds baffling, but in practice feels far more organic than the byzantine mechanics of instalments past. V-Skills activate new abilities (they give Ryu the ability to parry, for example) and fill up the character's V-Gauge. V-Triggers use up said gauge and act like extra special moves, while V-Reversals are useful if you're under the cosh, acting as super-blocks that push enemies back.

These new techniques add to the mix of special moves and powered-up EX attacks to create a fighting system that hits the sweet spot of easy-to-grasp but gruelling-to-master. For those coming to *Street Fighter* for the first

time, *SFV* is gratifyingly quick to get to grips with, shortening the obligatory training phase before players feel comfortable braving the crucible of competitive online play.

This latest iteration sees the franchise looking better than ever (the V-Skills in particular come with dazzling pyrotechnics), is snappily responsive and adds some welcome new faces to the roster in the form of Necalli, Rashid, Laura and F.A.N.G.. Combined with its assortment of gameplay tweaks, *Street Fighter V* represents the current state of the beat-'em-up art, and while PS4 exclusivity will come as a hadouken in the face for Xbox owners, for Sonyphiles this will be a thoroughly welcome return for a cherished classic. **STEVE BOXER**

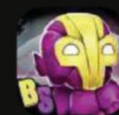
KILL THE COMMUTE



DUNGELOT: SHATTERED LANDS

iOS

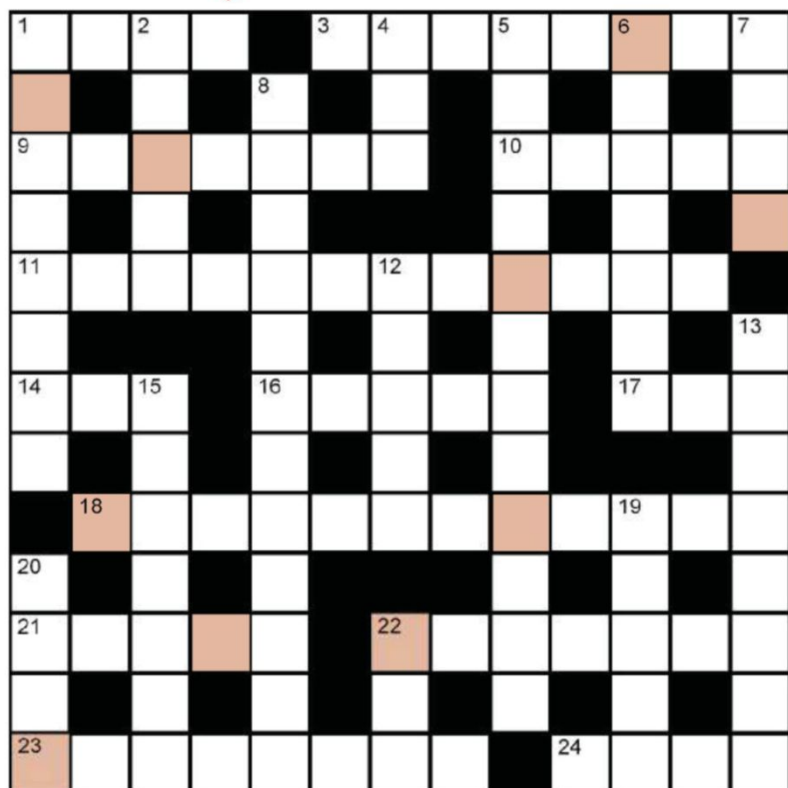
'Rogue-likes' are a genre based around random levels, punishing difficulty and the constant threat of permanent death. *DungeLOT: Shattered Lands* is one such title and has you looting and hacking through endless dungeons while flipping over tiles like a kind of axe-winging Minesweeper. Merciless, moreish and full of skeleton snipers.



CRASHLANDS

iOS/ANDROID

Despite its title's connotations of destruction, *Crashlands* is, at heart, a crafting game with a little role-playing thrown in for extra flavouring. You take the role of Flux Dabes, a robot whose ship has seen better days. By scavenging and combining components (more compelling than it sounds) you build your way to victory, beating up the occasional space hippo along the way.



ACROSS

- 1 Bruce, a misshapen nerd perhaps? (4)
 3 Emma, or Tessa from **10 ACROSS** (8)
 9 Harris, Gere, Todd maybe (7)
 10 Should it be titled *Rocky VII*? (5)
 11 Confused Daisy Wiretap creates a notable Japanese animated fairy tale (8,4)
 14 Malik found amid *The Martian* (3)
 16 Recurring 007 movie general portrayed by Walter Gotell (5)
 17 Number of faces of January required for a Viggo Mortensen starrer (3)
 18 Cameron Crowe's semi-autobiographical Best Screenplay Oscar-winner (6,6)
 21 Sonny Rollins supplied this soundtrack in 1966 (5)
 22 It was the last film directed by Howard Hawks (3,4)
 23 Sounds sweet, this Virginia Madsen-starring horror flick (8)
 24 Lake that brought horror to Michael Fassbender and Kelly Reilly (4)

DOWN

- 1 Her last major film was *With Six You Get Eggroll* (5,3)
 2 Meryl Streep's rocker who performed for Jonathan Demme in 2015 (5)
 4 "Newman means action!" read the poster blurb (3)
 5 Paul Hogan's *Strange Bedfellows* co-star (7,5)
 6 Kristen who was *Twilight*'s Bella Swan (7)
 7 It won two Scottish BAFTAs for Peter Mullan in 2011 (4)
 8 *Passport To Pimlico*, to name but one? (6,6)
 12 Tarantino's hateful number (5)
 13 Spencer Tracy grabbed a Best Actor Oscar for this (4,4)
 15 Don Siegel's 1977 spy movie (7)
 19 Chris, the keyboard-playing talent scout in *The Sapphires* (5)
 20 Crime thriller that linked Jason Patric and Ray Liotta in 2002 (4)
 22 Stephen, central to *Grease* it seems (3)

Competition ends April 25

HOW TO ENTER Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, actress, director or character. Text 'EMPIRE' to 83070, followed by your answer, name and address (with a space between each element of your message!). Texts cost 50p plus standard operator costs. Lines close at midnight, April 25. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

APRIL ANSWERS ACROSS 1 Flight, 4 Crimes, 9 Rudolph, 10 Brave, 11 Omaha, 12 Rat Race, 13 Ava Duvernay, 18 Telefon, 20 Gotti, 22 Traci, 23 Niagara, 24 Hannah, 25 Method. **DOWN** 1 Farrow, 2 India, 3 Holland, 5 Robot, 6 Mia Sara, 7 Steven, 8 The Revenant, 14 Villain, 15 Rag Tale, 16 Stitch, 17 Wizard, 19 Frida, 21 Trash. **ANAGRAM** Steve Rogers

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: One entry per person. Texts cost 50p + standard network rate. Ask the bill payer's permission before entering. Entries must be received before April 26 or will not be valid (but the cost of the text may still be charged). One winner will be selected at random. The model of the TV and Blu-ray may vary. Competition promoted by Bauer Consumer Media Limited t/a Empire ("Empire"). Empire's choice of winner is final and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified, by phone (on the number the text was sent), between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will call the winner a maximum of three times and leave one message. If the winner does not answer the phone or respond to the message within 14 days of the competition's end, Empire will select another winner and the original winner will not win a prize. Entrants must be over 18, resident in the UK and not be employed by Empire. The prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy: <http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk/>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider to arrange delivery of the prize. Bauer reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize) at any time if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email empire@bauermedia.co.uk. Complaints will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request (after the competition ends) by emailing empire@bauermedia.co.uk. For full T&Cs see <http://www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html>.

WIN!



WE ALL LOVE A GOOD LE CARRÉ, AND THE BBC has had the whole nation glued to its seats of a Sunday night thanks to its fantastic adaptation of *The Night Manager*. With a cast of A-listers including Tom Hiddleston, Hugh Laurie, Olivia Colman and David Harewood, it's a glossy production with more than a hint of Bond and all the twists and turns we've come to expect from the world's greatest writer of spy fiction. The type of (forgive the oxymoron) instant classic that will bear out many a repeat viewing, it'd make a fine addition to any home ent library — and happily it's out now on DVD and Blu-ray. We have a 43" smart LED TV, a Blu-ray player, the series on Blu-ray plus a copy of le Carré's source novel for one winner. To be in with a chance of getting your hands on these highly sensitive materials, solve the crossword to the left, figure out the anagram (maybe borrow a friend's Enigma machine) and text us your answer to the number below.

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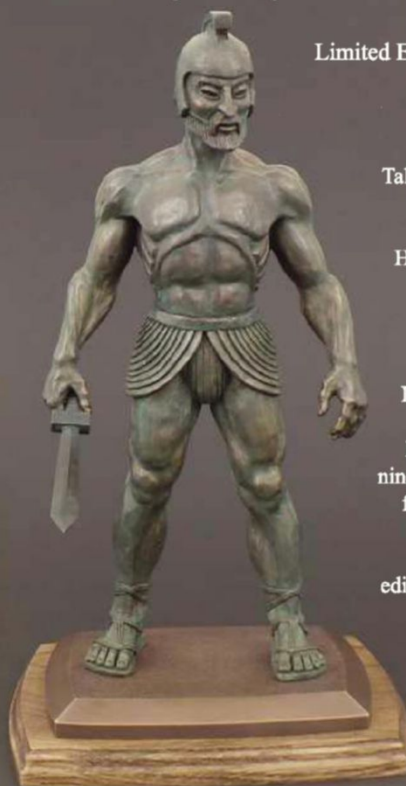
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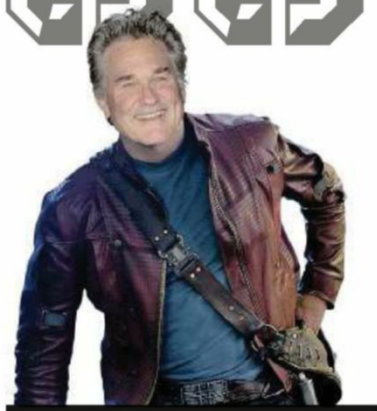
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COMMENT



"WHAT?? UNLIKE THE REST OF THE FREE WORLD, I'M NOT A HUGE FAN OF GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY. BUT IF YOU'RE GOING TO PUT MY MAN KURT IN THE MIX, I AM SUDDENLY ON BOARD."

KATE NERONE, FACEBOOK

BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS

So, as cinema chains draw screenings of *The Force Awakens* to a close after almost three months (during which time I saw the film eight times, twice taking my two children), Disney yesterday announced the Blu-ray release date. However, such news has received mixed emotions in our household: while the Blu-ray will be released on April 18, no 3D edition will be available until "later this year". This smacks of shameful tactics to force (no pun intended) fans of home 3D entertainment into a double-dip, a tactic befitting of a Sith Lord! I, for one, will not be indulging the House Of Mouse by purchasing twice, which leaves me with the agonising decision whether to live with the standard Blu-ray, or face enduring the pain of waiting for the version I really want. Aaaargh!!

BENJAMIN TRUSS, ESSEX

With only a sprinkling of the deleted scenes filmed on the Blu-ray, we suspect there will be deluxe editions arriving in the future. Bad news for fans' wallets, but frankly, the Force Awakens experience won't be complete until we've glimpsed Constable Zuvio.

"I'm with Simon Crook in Adventures In Streaming. I really like the film *Hudson Hawk*! #sorrynotsorry."

@KEV_AWAY

KEV ST JOHN

LETTER of the MONTH



FUTILE ATTRACTION?

Hey guys. I'm trying to impress Nicola from work, so I did this pic! I feel that she might go out with me if I can get at least a four-star review for my efforts, from such a revered institution as *Empire*! Thing is, Nicola is beautiful, but well, I'm really not, so I need all the help you can give me!

STEVE SHERGOLD, VIA EMAIL

We're moved by your romantic gesture, Steve, and to be honest, slightly scared. So with that in mind, please consider this a four-star review, with two stars thrown in for your extras. We really hope Nicola will be impressed enough to want to talk to you, at least.
Good luck!



Empire's star letter wins a Picturehouse Membership, plus one for a friend! Valid for one year at 23 Picturehouse Cinemas across the UK, including the brand-new Picturehouse Central in London's West End, each membership comes pre-loaded with four free tickets, and gets you access to priority booking and exclusive discounts on everything in the cinema. When you write to us, please ensure you include your full contact details so we can arrange delivery of your prize.



CROSSOVER CRAZY

Perhaps I have movie tie-ups on the brain, with the arrival of *Captain America: Civil War* and *Batman v Superman: Dawn Of Justice*. I couldn't help thinking of some interesting crossovers, such as *The Martian* meets *The Revenant*, in which Matt Damon is stalked by a bear on Mars. Or *Star Wars* meets *Indiana Jones*. What if Luke went looking for the Jedi temple, but found the Temple Of Doom instead? That would explain where the Knights Of Ren went. Could be a way to bring back Harrison Ford. Any more we can think of?

JAMES EDGAR, STONEBANK

Readers, you have been challenged. Meanwhile, we're off to Hollywood to pitch The Hateful Fast And Furious 8.



Why the superfluous 'sby'? #Grim

ROB FRANKLIN, @JUSTFRANKLIN VIA TWITTER

UNCIVIL WAR

I'm extremely annoyed that Dorian Lynskey decided it was okay to flippantly disclose a character's demise at the end of the *Civil War* comic series without a whiff of a spoiler alert. I doubt that this is what avid readers expect from this magazine.

JAMES CAMERON, VIA EMAIL

James, we apologise for any upset caused, and sincerely hope it has not affected your work on the Avatar sequels.



EMPIRE CLASSIC SCENE

The Fog

"ONE MORE STORY BEFORE 12."

SETTING THE SCENE When an early assembly of his follow-up to *Halloween* proved insufficiently spooky, John Carpenter added this prologue, in which John Houseman's Mr. Machen (who doesn't appear again in the rest of the film) sets up the film's plot with a chilling campfire tale while Carpenter's sombre theme chimes in the background. Striking in its simplicity — it's a three-minute sequence in which the only action is Machen checking his watch — it's one of the most memorable and haunting horror-film intros.

EXT. BEACH — NIGHT

A group of children sit huddled together on the sand, staring up at a dangling gold pocket watch. All that can be heard is the sound of ticking. Suddenly, the watch snaps shut. The man holding it speaks.

Machen: Eleven fifty-five. Almost midnight. Enough time for one more story. One more story before 12. Just to keep us warm.

He stares into the campfire burning between him and the children.

Machen: In five minutes, it will be the 21st of April. One hundred years ago, on the 21st of April, out on the waters around Spivey Point, a small clipper ship drew toward land. Suddenly, out of the night, the fog rolled in.

The children listen, mesmerised.

Machen: For a moment, they could see nothing. Not a foot ahead of them. And then, they saw a light. By God, it was a fire burning on the shore. Strong enough to penetrate the swirling mist. They steered a course toward the light. But

it was a campfire like this one. The ship crashed against the rocks. The hull sheared in two. The mast snapped like a twig. The wreckage sank, with all the men aboard.

Pin-drop silence.

Machen: At the bottom of the sea lay the Elizabeth Dane with her crew, their lungs filled with salt water, their eyes open, just staring into the darkness. And above, as suddenly as it had come, the fog lifted, receded back across the ocean and never came again. But it is told by the fishermen and their fathers and grandfathers that when the fog returns to Antonio Bay, the men at the bottom of the sea, out in the water by Spivey Point, will rise up and search for the campfire that led them to their dark and icy death.

A gloomy bell starts to toll in the distance.

Machen: Twelve o'clock. The 21st of April...

He stares into the distance solemnly as the camera slowly rises up into the night sky.

THREE DAYS OF THE CONDOR

Robert Redford and director Sydney Pollack teamed up for their fourth collaboration on *Three Days of the Condor*, a sinuous tale of deceit and corruption, as well as one of Hollywood's finest conspiracy thrillers of the 1970s.

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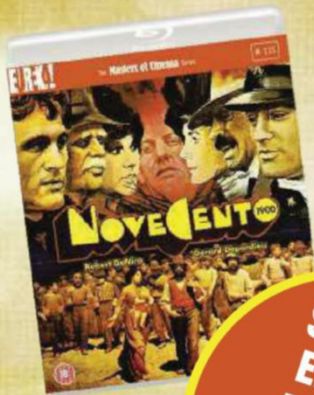
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